

**GOSPEL-DRIVEN GODLINESS AND CHURCH LEADERSHIP**  
**PART 7**

March 17, 2013

Text: Titus 1:10-16

**INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:**

A. APPOINT GODLY LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH (1:5-9)

In 1:10-16, Paul explains why (γάρ) Titus' appointment of qualified leadership in the Cretan churches is so important (i.e., there are many false teachers in Crete turning people away from the gospel). So then, Paul exhorts Titus to not only appoint godly leadership (1:5-9) but also to oppose ungodly leadership in the church (1:10-16).

B. OPPOSE UNGODLY LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH (1:10-16)

In order to help Titus and the churches recognize and oppose ungodly leadership, Paul gives 12 characteristics of false teachers and 2 action steps to take in order to prevent them from harming the church.

I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE TEACHERS

A. FALSE TEACHERS ARE INSUBORDINATE. v. 10

Unlike the qualified elders in v. 9 who hold firm to the gospel—fully submitted to it—false teachers refuse to submit to it. By implication, these false teachers also refused to submit to the authoritative leadership of the church—Paul, Titus and the elders Titus will appoint. Ultimately, these false teachers are in reality refusing to submit to Christ's rule and reign since God has chosen to use the human ministry to govern His church.

B. FALSE TEACHERS ARE EMPTY TALKERS. v. 10

By refusing to submit to the gospel, Paul says these false teachers are full of meaningless talk. They lack sound, wholesome substance in their teaching precisely because their teaching is gospeless.

C. FALSE TEACHERS ARE DECEIVERS. v. 10

Not only is the teaching of false teachers meaningless it is also deceptive. Legalism is exceedingly deceptive. Its power lies in its ability to conceal its evil origin—Christ-denying unbelief—with a deceptive attractiveness. Legalism lies in that it promises salvation and holiness apart from Christ. On the surface, legalism always gives the

appearance of holiness. But, in reality it is nothing more than demonic, Christ-denying deception that turns people away from the gospel and the sufficiency of Christ for salvation. Calvin writes, "Hence we may infer how dangerous it is to make even the smallest departure from sound doctrine; for he does not say that the doctrines, by which they overturned the faith of many, were openly wicked; but we may understand by this designation every kind of corruption, when there is a turning aside from the desire of edification," (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 299). This brings us to a fourth characteristic of false teachers.

#### **LESSON:**

#### **D. FALSE TEACHERS ARE DESTRUCTIVE. v. 11**

Any teaching that turns people away from the centrality of the gospel and the sufficiency of Christ for salvation is destructive. Verse 11 reveals the main threat of false teachers and their teaching. Their destructive effects on the church comes closest to expressing Paul's urgency over the situation in Crete (see Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, p. 178).

By refusing to submit to the gospel, Paul says these false teachers "must be silenced" because they are "upsetting whole families." The word, "upsetting" (ἀνατρέπω) is the same word that John uses in John 2:15, where Jesus "overturned" the moneychangers' tables. Paul uses this word in 2 Timothy 2:18 to speak of false teachers, two of whom he names specifically, who were "overthrowing" the faith of some by teaching that the resurrection had already happened.

At this time, there was still not a cohesive church structure in place in these young Cretan churches. Believers still met in homes and there were not enough qualified elders to oversee all of the house churches. As a result, there were not enough godly elders present who could oppose false teachers in order to keep them from harming the church. The false teachers took full advantage of the lack of qualified leadership and infiltrated the Cretan households. In v. 12, Paul describes these false teachers as "evil beasts." Paul says these false teachers were a like a wild animal who preys on the most helpless of the herd. Martin Luther writes, "The dangerous doctrine was so successful because it always sought out those who were not powerful in Holy Scripture and who could be easily deceived," (*Luther's Works*, vol. 29, p. 37).

The extent of their destructive teaching was quite large. Paul says these false teachers were overturning "whole households/families" (ὅλους οἴκους). What makes false teachers so dangerous is that they are destructive to many others as well. In 2 Timothy 2:17, Paul says false teaching spreads like gangrene. Paul uses this serious medical condition to describe how the destructive effects of false teachers and their teaching spread throughout the church. This destructive effect is in contrast to the "sound" or "healthy" teaching of those who hold firm to the trustworthy word. As previously noted, any teaching that turns a person away from

Christ and His gospel is exceedingly destructive. For, the gospel is not on the seed of regeneration but it is also the food of the soul.

The danger of false teaching and its growing influence is a constant threat. Martin Luther writes, "If, even after all our sermons, a fanatic were to come here, he could subvert everything in three weeks," (*Luther's Works*, vol. 29, p. 37). In Galatians 1:6, Paul expresses his astonishment at how quickly the Galatians began to turn to a different "gospel" (emphasis added). John Calvin writes, "Thus it is in reality, that, amidst so great weakness of the flesh, we are exceedingly prone to fall; and hence it arises, that satan easily and speedily destroys, by his ministers, what godly teachers had reared with great and long-continued toil" (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 299).

Notice how Paul says the false teachers were upsetting whole families (i.e., "by teaching...what they ought not to teach."). They were upsetting whole households by teaching Jewish myths and commandments of men (v. 14). They were espousing certain ascetic practices as a means to purity and that as a means to justification or righteousness before God (1:15-16). They were engaging in "foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law," (3:9) and thus stirring up division within the churches (3:10).

The false teachers in Ephesus were similar to the false teachers Crete. In 1 Timothy 4:3, the false teachers in Ephesus were issuing ascetic prohibitions of marriage and certain foods. These legalistic prohibitions of marriage fit nicely with the issue of "purity" in Titus 1:15-16. George Knight asks, "Might the prohibition of marriage involve ending existing marriages," (*The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 298). If then the ascetic prohibitions in Titus 1:15-16 include marriage, one can see more clearly how such legalistic teaching could be so destructive to whole families.

In any case, the important to note here is the destructive effect that false teaching has on the church (Note: In this context the false teaching involved a deadly mixture of Jewish legal teaching and Gentile/Cretan immorality). Legalism, in all forms—strict (Pelagianism) or moderate (covenantal nomism)—remodels the gospel (unconditional to conditional) and nullifies (makes useless) the death and victory of Christ (Gal. 2:21).

Martin Luther observes that if a person is able to abolish sins and to merit the forgiveness of sins and eternal life by his or her own righteousness and ascetic practices, what good does it do them that Christ was born, suffered, shed His blood, was raised, conquered sin, death, and the devil, when they themselves can overcome their sin by their own powers? He concludes, "It is indescribable what great wickedness it is to make Christ useless" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 27, p. 10).

Tragically, it appears these young churches were financially supporting these false teachers, who were opponents of the gospel. This leads to the fifth characteristic of false teachers.

E. FALSE TEACHERS ARE GREEDY. v. 11

The second reason Paul says these false teachers “must be silenced” is because their motives were sinful. Paul says the primary motivation behind their destructive teaching was “for the sake of shameful gain.” A mercenary spirit—one who is influenced by greed—rather than the Holy Spirit drove these false legalistic teachers.

They were perpetual violators of the 10th Commandment. They were full of covetousness. Their idol was money and greed was the fruit of their idolatry. Greed is the exact opposite of what characterizes elders who hold firm to the gospel (Titus 1:7; cf. 1 Tim. 3:3, “love of money”). Instead of finding their status in money, godly leaders find their status in Christ and His gospel (i.e., they hold firm to the trustworthy word, v. 9). False teachers, however, do not hold firm to the trustworthy word (v. 9). Rather, they are “insubordinate” (v. 10) and hold firm to the love of money, which Paul says “is a root of all kinds of evils.” Paul writes, “It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs,” (1 Tim. 6:10).

False teachers are greedy instead of generous because they fail to understand the generosity of Christ in the gospel, where He generously poured out His wealth for sinners. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, Paul writes, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.”

The desire for financial gain by false teachers was an ongoing problem in the early church (and still is today!). In Paul’s day teachers and their motives were widely guarded with suspicion (Towner, *The Letters To Timothy and Titus*, p. 698). So, to avoid coming under this suspicion, Paul says it is vital for the church to not only appoint men who are not “greedy for gain” (v. 7, cf. 1 Tim. 3:3) but also to silence (v. 11), rebuke (v. 13) and if need be remove all who are (3:10).

Scholars tell us that the Cretans possessed a reputation for loving money. These false teachers reflected this vice. They were motivated by what they could get out of others (money) rather than what they could impart to others (gospel). In Titus 1:1-2, Paul begins the letter by stating that the primary motivation behind a godly leader’s ministry is “for the sake of “1 the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, 2 and hope of eternal life...”

It is important to keep in mind that these false teachers professed to know God (v. 16; i.e., they claimed to be Christians and were part of the visible church.). Yet, Paul describes them as insubordinate, empty talkers, deceivers, destructive and greedy.

They were teaching things “they ought not to teach” under the appearance of truth. As a result, they were deceiving these young, uninformed believers and turning them away from the gospel.

They infiltrated homes and sought to gain converts for the sake of “shameful gain.” “Shameful,” (αἰσχρός) means that which is “socially or morally unacceptable, shameful, base,” (BDAG, 29). Teaching error in the name Christ for the sake of financial gain is shameful. One bible teacher calls this the “prostitution of the high gifts of a teacher” (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 397). Like prostitution, their profit was shameful because they sought to enrich themselves by teaching error in the name of truth at the expense of the young Cretan believers (i.e., “upsetting whole families”).

Some have suggested that the greater crime was that of siphoning off support that was intended for other genuine traveling teachers (Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, p. 697). It is most regrettable when false teachers abound financially and churches that are faithful to the gospel struggle to get by. Siphoning off financial support from faithful ministers of the gospel is indeed tragic! But even with such unjust circumstances, the man who holds firm to the trustworthy word (i.e., the gospel) trusts in Christ’s care and provision and doesn’t fall prey to the love of money. The author of Hebrews reflects this godly attitude when he writes, “<sup>5</sup> Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for He has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” <sup>6</sup> So we can confidently say, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

It is important to note that Paul is not saying that godly, faithful elders should not be paid. In 1 Corinthians 9:4, Paul asks, “Do we not have the right to eat and drink,” meaning, “Do we not have the right to financial support?” In 1 Corinthians 9:14, Paul writes, “...the Lord commanded those who proclaim the gospel to receive their living by the gospel.” In 1 Timothy 5:17-18, Paul singles out some elders as deserving of “...double honor—generous remuneration—, namely those who labor in preaching and teaching.” Clearly, there is an honorable way of making money in the gospel ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 9; Gal. 6:6). This, however, was not the issue. The issue here isn’t money but the false teachers motives.

In Ezekiel 34, God instructs Ezekiel to prophesy against the shepherds (Kings) of Israel. The Kings of Israel were to be godly, caring leaders who protected God’s people like a shepherd, who guards his sheep (cf. Deut. 17:14-20). In Deuteronomy 17:16-17, God warns Israel that their kings—unlike other kings—must not abuse their power for the sake of personal gain, which is contrary to His Law. Instead, Israel’s kings were to live and rule under the authority of God’s Law (17:18-20). Regrettably, Israel’s leaders were not submitted to God’s authority. They were not driven by a desire to serve God or the citizens of Israel but rather themselves (i.e., to make shameful profit). They abused their power for the sake of personal gain. Thus, the LORD says to Ezekiel in Ezekiel 34:2-3, 5,

<sup>2</sup> Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them—to the shepherds: “This is what the sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not shepherds feed the flock? <sup>3</sup> You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you

slaughter the choice animals, but you do not feed the sheep!...<sup>5</sup> They were scattered because they had no shepherd, and they became food for every wild beast.

There is a parallel between the unjust Kings of Israel and the false teachers in Crete namely both put their own self-interests above the needs and interests of others. Israel's kings added to their wealth at the expense of the common people. Likewise, the false teachers sought wealth at the expense of the young Cretan believers. The churches in Crete became "food" for the "evil beasts" (i.e., false teachers).

Israel's kings viewed the flock as a source of wealth to be exploited rather than a trust to be protected," (see Charles Dyer, "Ezekiel," p. 1294). Likewise, the false teachers in Crete sought to exploit God's people rather than protect them. In contrast, Paul teaches that a gospel-ordered church is organized for service not domineering and exploiting. In 1 Peter 5:2-3, Peter teaches this same truth. He exhorts, "2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

Ed Clowney writes, "All government in the church is stewardship: i.e., its leaders are servant-managers, who use their authority only to advance the interests of those they represent and serve," (*The Church*, p. 202). Overseers, as God's stewards, hold fast to the trustworthy word so that they are enabled to advance the interests (faith) of those whom are committed to their charge (Titus 1:7, 9).

A clear sign then of a false teacher is that they love money rather than Christ, His church and His gospel. They exploit and domineer people rather than protect and serve them. Any "teacher" who holds firm to money is not "above reproach." He possesses a public reputation of being "greedy for shameful gain" and is unfit to lead because his greed brings great reproach upon the reputation of Christ, His gospel and His church.

In contrast, those who hold firm to the gospel are above reproach, namely they are not "greedy for gain" (v. 7, αἰσχροκερδής). By grace, they are free of a public accusation of shameful gain. But, instead of being thoroughly immersed in the gospel, which produces godliness, Paul says these greedy teachers were thoroughly immersed in the ungodly Cretan culture. This leads us to a sixth characteristic of false teachers.

#### F. False Teachers are a Reflection of Fallen Culture. vv. 12-13a

Driven by greed, Paul says these false Jewish teachers were a reflection of the ungodly culture of Crete. They had absorbed the worst character-traits of their fellow Gentile countrymen. Their character and conduct epitomized the worst of Cretan society (Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, p. 699). Like many of the

Cretans, these false teachers were of low, moral character. To draw attention to this fact, Paul appeals to one of Crete's own highly respected teachers, Epimenides (6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.), who was himself critical of the Cretan character.

Epimenides was held in high regard among the Cretans as a prophet (Note: The term "prophet" is not to be understood in the biblical sense of "prophet." Rather, this term would have been a title of honor given to people known to have been great teachers and poets. see Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, p. 700.).

Paul's argument is quite brilliant. It would be one thing for Paul to offer a critique of the dishonest, corrupt culture of Crete. However, one would expect that an honored prophet among his own people would boast about his fellow countryman. Yet, Crete's own highly venerated "prophet" offered an unfavorable critique of his own people by stating "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." Barclay writes, "The ancient world spoke of the three most evil C's—the Cretans, the Cilicians, and the Cappadocians. The Cretans were famed as a drunken, insolent, untrustworthy, lying and gluttonous people," (*The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p. 242).

By quoting one of their highly, regarded prophets, Paul put the false teachers in a dilemma. They must either admit the truthfulness of their venerated prophet's indictment or deny it and make him a liar. The three vices of the Cretans, mentioned by Epimenides, characterize the false teachers. Paul's description of the false teachers, using one of their own prophets as evidence, was a severe denunciation. He demonstrates how the false teachers were nothing more than a reflection of Crete's fallen culture rather than a reflection of godliness, which flows from the gospel.

"Liars"—The Cretans possessed a notorious reputation for telling lies (this being in contrast to the "God...who never lies" (1:2). Their most famous lie was the claim that Zeus was buried on their island (Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals and Hebrews*, p. 353). Obviously, such a claim was false because, as a god, Zeus was considered to be immortal. Their lying reputation "had given rise to the noun, 'Cretism,' meaning 'Cretan behavior,' that is lying...and to the verb 'to Cretize' or 'to speak like a Cretan,' which meant 'to tell lies,' 'to deceive,'..." (Ibid, p. 353). Paul indicts the false teachers as being just like the Cretans—perpetuators of lies (i.e., empty talkers and deceivers, v. 10).

"Evil beasts,"—Paul compares the false teachers to "evil beasts." His point is quite strong because Crete didn't have wild animals. Paul is saying that Crete had no need of wild beasts because its own inhabitants—in this case false teachers—were sufficient (cf. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, p. 701)! Cretans were not only infamous for lying but they were also well known for their barbaric, wild, animal-like behavior. In reference to the false teachers, "evil beasts" speaks of their rebellious and malicious character, which is analogous to untamed, wild animals (cf. v. 10- insubordinate). Like wild animals devouring their prey, these false teachers were deceivers and destroyers of believer's minds and consciences (Titus 1:15).

Motivated by greed, they were characterized by wild and dangerous conduct that was destroying whole families (Titus 1:11).

“Lazy gluttons,”—Lastly, Paul speaks of these false teachers as, “lazy gluttons.” The Cretans were known to indulge in their excessive and uncontrollable appetites. Polybius writes, “So much in fact do sordid love of gain and lust for wealth prevail among them, that the Cretans are the only people in the world in whose eyes no gain is disgraceful,” (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, p. 397). Just as the Cretans indulged in uncontrollable appetites and lied for selfish purposes so the false teachers were driven to lie out of their uncontrolled desire for wealth. Like the false teachers in Ephesus, the false teachers in Crete imagined that godliness is a means of gain (1 Tim. 6:5).

In v. 13a, Paul confirms this ancient proverbial saying by stating, “This testimony is true.” The unflattering description of Epimenides was fulfilled in the character and conduct of the false teachers. To be sure, Paul is not saying that all Cretans are liars. Certainly, this is not the case as is clear from vv. 6-9. What Paul means is that this proverbial saying is true in regard to the false teachers, who were themselves Cretans. In contrast to the gospel-born character of qualified leadership (vv. 6-9) these false teachers exercised no concern for others, no self-control, no gentleness or just behavior. Instead of teaching “sound doctrine,” which builds up, they were teaching “unsound doctrine,” which destroys whole households.

#### **REFLECTION:**

As we reflect on the abovementioned vices of these false teachers, there is a silver-thread running through Paul’s unflattering description. It can be easily missed if read too quickly. What then is this silver-thread? The silver-thread running through Paul’s unflattering description is: The gospel of grace holds out hope for change for those who are ungodly!

As just noted above, not all the Cretans were liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons. Not all were perpetuators of lies, empty talkers and deceivers. Not all were rebellious and malicious in their character. Not all were motivated by greed. Not all were known to indulge in their excessive and uncontrollable appetites and lie for selfish purposes and shameful gain.

Some of the Cretans (cf. v. 1, “God’s elect”) had been radically changed as evidenced by the fact that the elders Titus was commissioned to appoint (vv. 5-9) were Cretans! The gospel creates a culture far different from the fallen culture in which a Christian lives. John Stott writes, “We need, then, to remind ourselves that Paul believed in the power of the gospel to change people...” (*1 Timothy & Titus*, p. 181).

The reason Paul believed this is because he was the most improbable sinner to have ever been saved! Listen to his personal testimony in 1 Timothy 1:13-17,



<sup>13</sup> though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. <sup>16</sup> But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. <sup>17</sup> To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul tells us why Jesus came into the world, namely to save sinners! The Cretans were not “nice, decent, moral” people and neither are we! Jesus didn’t come to save nice, decent, moral people! He came into the world to save dirty, rotten, people like the Cretans and like you and me!

He came to save sinners, of whom Paul says, “I am the foremost.” When you begin to awaken to the true demand of God’s law, this is your confession, “I am the foremost.” When you begin to awaken to the true requirement of God’s law for righteousness you begin to see that you are just like the Cretans. You see that you are filled with a dishonest heart. You see that your whole life has been rebellious toward God and that you have never once obeyed His commands perfectly. You see that your heart is filled with greed and materialism. You see that money is an idol and that you are not content with what you have. Tim Keller writes,

Nobody thinks they are greedy. As a pastor I've had people come to me and confess that they struggle with almost every kind of sin. Almost. I cannot recall anyone ever coming to me and saying, "I spend too much money on myself. I think my greedy lust for money is harming my family, my soul, and people around me." Greed hides itself from the victim. The money god's modus operandi includes blindness to your own heart," (*Counterfeit Gods*, p. 52).

Yet, here is the good news! Paul says the Lord came to save sinners like this! You may doubt and wonder how can I be sure? Paul says in his testimony that the Lord saved him in order to serve as a never-ending example that the good news of grace can save the worst of sinners! Paul knew how bad he was and if he wasn’t beyond the reach of God’s transforming grace than no one is! Godly leaders preach the gospel in such a way that the worst sinner who is listening will know that the Lord Jesus Christ has saved worst sinner yet—Paul! If Jesus could save Paul, He can save any sinner.

Like Paul, the Cretans served as trophies of God’s transforming grace. John Calvin writes, “It was a truly wonderful purpose of God, that he called a nation so depraved, and so infamous on account of its vices, to be among the first who should partake of the gospel...” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 302). William Barclay writes,

The Cretans were notorious liars and cheats and gluttons and traitors but here is the wonderful thing. Knowing that, and actually experiencing it, Paul does not say to Timothy: 'Leave them alone. They are hopeless and all men know it.' He says: 'They are bad and all men know it. Go and convert them.' (obviously conversion is an act of God-J.F.) Few passages so demonstrate the divine optimism of the Christian evangelist, who refuses to regard any man as hopeless. The greater the evil, the greater the challenge. It is the Christian conviction that there is no sin too great for the grace of Jesus Christ to conquer," (*The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p. 243).

Do you believe that this morning for yourself? Whether you are an unbeliever or believer, the gospel announces to us that there is NO sin too great for the grace of Jesus Christ to conquer! In Romans 5:20, Paul says, "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more!"

The glory of the gospel of God's saving grace is that it can bring salvation to such a notoriously sinful people and begin training them to "renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ," (Titus 2:11-13).

The power of the gospel to bring about such a gracious transformation of life leads to worship. Notice how Paul concludes his testimony in 1 Timothy 1:17, "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." Ed Clowney writes, "The overwhelming glory of God, revealed in the gospel, is the glory of His grace. It is not just the transcendent power, wisdom and righteousness of God that demand our worship, but, above all, His love and mercy," (*The Church*, pp. 119-120).

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