

GOSPEL-DRIVEN GODLINESS AND CHURCH LEADERSHIP  
PART 6

Text: Titus 1:10-16

March 10, 2013

**INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:**

In 1 Peter 2:25, Peter says that Jesus is the Great Shepherd and Faithful Overseer of the church. As such, He not only faithfully feeds His sheep but also protects them. However, upon His ascension, He no longer dwells among the church by His visible presence. Nevertheless, our Lord continues to rule and reign over His church as the Great Shepherd and Faithful Overseer. In Ephesians 4:8ff., Paul says that when Jesus ascended He gave gifts to men (i.e., church leaders) through whom He has chosen to exercise His rule and reign in the church. Our Lord has graciously delegated the titles of shepherd (Eph. 4:11) and overseer (Titus 1:7) to qualified men whom He uses to govern His church.

In Titus 1:5-16, Paul shows how God uses the human ministry of elders to not only feed but also protect the life and wellbeing of His church. In this section, Paul links the gospel, which accords with godliness in relation to leadership in the church. In 1:5-9, Paul assigns to Titus the important task of appointing qualified leadership in the church.

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

Men who hold firm to the gospel and possess godly character are fit to lead in the church. Now, in 1:10-16, Paul explains why (γάρ, v. 10) Titus' appointment of qualified leadership is so important, particularly v. 9. The reason appointing qualified leadership is so vital is because there are many false teachers in Crete turning people away from the gospel and devastating the church. So then, just as Titus must appoint godly leadership in the church he must also oppose ungodly leadership—false teachers—in the church.

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

Men who are unfaithful to the gospel (speak against sound doctrine, v. 9) and live ungodly lives are not fit to lead in the church. There is a sense of urgency in Paul's language and tone. He says that there were an alarming number of false teachers present in the Cretan churches ("there are many"). These false teachers posed a dangerous threat to the young churches. Without the appointment of leaders who hold firm to the gospel, the churches of Crete would be corrupted and ruined because there would be no one to oppose the spread of destructive teaching. "Diseased doctrine," writes Alexander Strauch, "ruins the lives of its adherents (1 Tim. 6:3-5), while sound doctrine [law/gospel-J.F.] produces godly, clean, wholesome, healthy lives (Titus 1:13; 2:1)," (*Biblical Eldership*, p. 237).

Concerning the significance of the pastoral office of the church, Calvin writes, “For neither the light and heat of the sun, nor food and drink, are so necessary to nourish and sustain the present life as the apostolic and pastoral office is necessary to preserve the church on earth” (*Institutes*, 4.3.2). There is nothing more notable or glorious in the church than the ministry of the gospel since it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit and of righteousness and eternal life (*Institutes*, 4.3.3). This is precisely why there is nothing more attacked and undermined in the church than the ministry of the gospel.

If the young Cretan churches were to be strengthened and flourish, it was essential for their life, health and protection to have godly leadership in place who could recognize false teachers and oppose their destructive teaching. Just as it is vital for the church to be able to recognize and appoint godly leadership, it is also vital, especially the elders, to be able to recognize and oppose ungodly leadership. So then, in order to aid Titus and the churches in recognizing and opposing ungodly leadership, Paul gives twelve characteristics of false teachers and two action steps to take in order to prevent them from harming the church. These characteristics and action steps not only apply to Paul’s day but to every age.

#### **LESSON:**

##### **I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF FALSE TEACHERS**

The false teachers that Paul names and engages are in stark contrast to the description of godly leaders he just described in vv. 6-9. In vv. 6-9, Paul gave 13 divinely ordained descriptions of godly men who must be appointed. In vv. 10-16, Paul gives 12 divinely designated descriptions of ungodly men who must be opposed—rebuked and silenced.

##### **A. FALSE TEACHERS ARE INSUBORDINATE. V. 10**

Unlike the qualified elders in v. 9 who hold firm to the gospel, false teachers refuse to submit to it (Note: Paul used the same word in v. 6 to speak of rebellious children.). At the heart of those who speak against sound doctrine (v. 9, law and gospel) is a refusal to submit to the gospel as taught by Paul. By implication, these false teachers also refused to submit to the authoritative leadership of the church—Paul, Titus and the properly appointed elders.

By refusing to submit to the gospel and the leadership of the church, these false teachers are in reality refusing to submit to Christ’s rule and reign for as Calvin notes, God “uses the ministry of men to declare His will to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them His right and honor, but only that through their mouths He may do His own work—just as a workman uses a tool to do his work,” (*Institutes*, 4.3.1.).

Thus, an ungodly teacher is first of all insubordinate; a rebel who scorns the authority of the church's Apostolic teaching and God-ordained leadership. Paul exhorts Titus in 2:15, "Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you." False teachers disregard the human ministry of the church, which God uses to govern, feed and protect His church.

Here then is evidence of a life breaking the 5th commandment, which is a refusal to submit oneself to those in authority since it is God's will to govern us by their hand (see Heidelberg Catechism, Q, 104). A sure sign of a false teacher is that he does not allow himself to be placed under any authority. False teachers avoid accountability. They operate under their own authority. Rather, than receiving the validation and confirmation of the church (Acts 13:2-3; Gal. 2:9; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22), false teachers are self-appointed. Insubordination is a large red flag of a false teacher in the church.

A lack of a teachable spirit goes hand in hand with insubordination. In contrast, in 1:9, Paul states that a leader who is "above reproach" "holds firm to the trustworthy word as taught." Godly leaders submit their minds and lives to the gospel as passed down by the Apostles. Godly leaders live and labor as those under the authority of Apostolic teaching. It is in this way that the church recognizes godly leaders as "above reproach" in both their life and doctrine.

The rejection of the gospel is the origin of all the problems in the Cretan churches. Once the authority of the Apostolic gospel is dismissed, there are no safeguards for the church or warrant for the Christian faith. For, the gospel is the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which He uses to not only create the church but also to nurture, sustain, and strengthen the church.

#### B. FALSE TEACHERS ARE EMPTY TALKERS. V. 10

By refusing to submit to the gospel, Paul says these false teachers are "empty talkers" (i.e., full of meaningless talk). By failing to hold firm to the gospel, false teachers lack sound, wholesome substance in their teaching. They utter "empty, senseless things," ("ματαιολόγος," *Thayer Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, n.p.). Their teaching is useless and futile because it is gospelsless (cf. 1:14-16).

It is non-sense. False teachers are teachers of nonsense (Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, p. 694). These false teachers speak about many things but accomplish nothing. In 1 Timothy 1:7, Paul describes false teachers as "desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions."

In contrast, those who hold firm to the gospel are empowered to exhort in "sound doctrine," which promotes faith, knowledge of the truth (gospel), godliness and hope (Titus 1:1-2). Sound doctrine orders the church whereas unsound doctrine

disorders the church. Sound doctrine enlightens whereas unsound doctrine deceives.

C. FALSE TEACHERS ARE DECEIVERS. V. 10

Not only is the teaching of false teachers meaningless it is also deceptive. These false teachers used impressive language that lacked solid, saving content, which was exceedingly deceptive. Regrettably, the young Cretan converts were buying into their deception and the effect is that instead of leading their hearers to the truth they lead them away from it (v. 14). The word Paul uses, "φρεναπάτης," literally means "a mind-deceiver," *Thayer Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, n.p. These false teachers were deceiving the minds of the young Cretan converts.

False teachers mislead vulnerable, gullible, unsuspecting sheep by their senseless teaching. The power of false teaching lies in its ability to deceive. It is important to note that these false teachers were professing believers in the church. This is one of the reasons they were (and are) deceptive. They professed to be believers and they used biblical terminology.

We must recognize that the greatest danger to the church always comes from within. This is why Paul warned the believers in Rome, "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve," (Rom. 16:17-18; cf. Acts 20:29-30).

In Ephesians 4:14, Paul writes that people who are ignorant and/or infantile in their knowledge of the Son of God—gospel—are easily deceived. This is why, Paul states, that the Lord has given pastor-teachers to the church, namely "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (Eph. 4:14). God uses this human ministry to govern the church so that believers may come "to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," (Eph. 4:13).

Nowhere does Scripture refer to spiritual infancy as commendable. Believers are expected to grow (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18). Believers who remain infantile in their knowledge of the gospel are easily deceived. They are vulnerable to the deceitful schemes of the enemy. Paul has already stated in Titus 1:1 that the gospel is not only essential for coming to faith but also moving on in the faith ("the knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness"). We must, then, continue moving on in the gospel and remain alert, learning how to recognize false teachers in order to keep them from harming the church.

Who were these rebellious, senseless, deceiving teachers that Paul is referring to in this context? And, why was their teaching "meaningless talk and deceptive?"

Paul identifies these rebellious, senseless, deceiving teachers as “namely those of the circumcision [party].” This description refers to a group of Jewish Christians/converts. Historians confirm that there was a large Jewish population on Crete at this time (cf. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 234). It is important to note that Paul names his opponents. There are times when it is necessary, for the sake of the church’s wellbeing, to publicly identify those who contradict sound doctrine. Calvin writes, “We ought no listen to those who plead that we should spare the reputation of this or that individual, when the matter in question is the great danger of the whole Church,” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 298). Faithful shepherds alert their sheep to dangers and potential dangers to their faith.

These false teachers were under the strong influence of Jewish rabbis as well as the corrupt culture of Crete (see Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals and Hebrews*, pp. 35-351). It appears the false teachers were teaching the Cretan believers that something more than faith in the simple Apostolic teaching/gospel message (v. 9) was needed in order to be saved and to be godly. They were calling into question whether faith in Jesus alone was sufficient for salvation.

In 1:14, Paul says these false teachers were devoted to “Jewish myths and the commands of men” (instead of being devoted to “the teaching” of the Apostles v. 9). In 1:15-16, Paul seems to be alluding to the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Covenant, specifically issues involving clean and unclean foods (also perhaps prohibition of marriage, cf. 1 Tim. 4:3). In 3:9, he speaks about “foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law.”

In addition then to “the teaching” of the Apostles (v. 9), these false teachers sought to persuade these young converts that what they really needed to be “wise” were the “subtle stories and the long genealogies and elaborate allegories of the Rabbis” (Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p. 240). What the Cretan believers needed was the “deeper” message of the Scriptures. If the Cretan believers wanted to be really “pure” before God they needed to observe the “circumcision party’s” rules and regulations (commandments of men; purification rights and ceremonies concerning clean and unclean foods). Such ascetic practices—withdrawal from the world and abstinence—were the means to holiness and justification or righteousness before God. The gospel of grace wasn’t sufficient for purity before God.

The false teachers devotion to Jewish laws (masquerading as God’s laws), ascetic practices, myths and genealogies were destructive and creating disorder in the churches. 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).

Unlike Galatians, there is no mention in Titus of any insistence by these false teachers for the rite of circumcision. So it seems that the "circumcision party" is not quite the same as in Galatians. However, given that these false teachers were Jewish, it seems quite incredible that circumcision played no role given the fact that Paul addresses the role of the gospel in regeneration and justification in 3:4-7. Thus, it seems the issue of circumcision for salvation shouldn't be completely ruled out. William Hendriksen, for example, notes that these Jewish legalists no doubt believed their circumcision to be a mark of spiritual superiority, which entitled them to be heard and respected by others (cf. Hendriksen, p. 351; cf. v. 16, they boasted of "professing to know God"). Paul, however, attributes good works to the power and sufficiency of the gospel, which strips away any note of spiritual superiority on the part of the believer (2:11-14).

We know in the early church that the "circumcision party" insisted that circumcision for Gentiles was necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1). And we know that the "circumcision party" insisted that Gentile converts had to keep the law of Moses (Acts 15:5), which is what Paul seems to be speaking of in vv. 15-16. Nevertheless, whether it is the Judaizers in Galatia teaching that circumcision is necessary for salvation or the false teachers in Crete teaching that commandments of men and ascetic practices are necessary for salvation/purity before God, the deceptive and destructive effect is the same, namely something other than the simple gospel message is necessary for salvation.

Consequently, it seems that these false Jewish teachers were "not satisfied with the pure doctrine of Christ" (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 304). Instead they were devoted to their own myths, human rules and regulations and ceremonial observances and rituals for purity and cleansing—salvation—before God. These law teachers speak about many things but accomplish nothing in regard to salvation and true godliness.

Such legalistic teaching was deceiving the minds of the young Cretan converts. Perhaps they were questioning, "Does the gospel teach salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone?" "Have we missed the real, deep meaning of Scripture by believing that Scripture is essentially a witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ?" "Are there deeper truths—'secret insights'—from the Scriptures that we need to learn from these teachers?" "Do we need to observe their purification rites and ceremonies for purity of heart and life before God or is faith in Christ alone sufficient?"

The false teachers answered, "Yes." Paul answered, "No!" This then is why Paul characterizes these false teachers as "insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers."

They were not submitted to the authoritative teaching passed down by the Apostles (cf. 1:9). They knew neither God's law (they followed commandments of men) nor His gospel (they did not hold firm to the trustworthy word). Consequently, they were just empty talkers. They were, as Shakespeare writes in *Macbeth*, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Any teaching that seeks to persuade someone that something more than grace through faith in Christ alone based on the Apostolic message alone (Scripture) is necessary for salvation (i.e., regeneration, purity, cleansing, justification, sanctification, godliness, etc...) is clear evidence they are not submitted to the gospel. Such teachers are false, unfit to lead in the church and must be silenced.

Paul left the Cretan churches with the pure, unmixed Apostolic teaching of the gospel. But, as soon as he left, these false teachers came in and began to corrupt its purity by mixing it with their leaven (cf. *Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 304). Such a deadly mixture deceives believer's minds. Our legal hearts are constantly trying to persuade us that there is purity in the sight of God by some other means than simple faith in Christ alone. Holiness by means of rule keeping rather than Christ-trusting is exceedingly deceptive. Ralph Erskine writes, "The legalist will complain more for want (lack) of holiness than for want (lack) of Christ," (*Gospel Truth*, p. 292).

The legalist is always more worried by immorality than anything else. If people are "moral" but ignorant of Jesus the legalist is happy enough. But, there are no rules, ceremonies, deeper insights in Scripture, etc... that can help a man obtain cleanness and purity before God. All righteousness, purity and godliness are found by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Ultimately any teaching that undermines the utter sufficiency of Christ and His gospel for salvation is utter nonsense; totally useless in regard to matters of salvation. The gospel proclaims, "Jesus is sufficient."

#### **REFLECTION:**

The message that is not useless, meaningless and deceptive is the simple Apostolic teaching, the trustworthy word, passed on by Paul. The gospel is the power of God for salvation. Jesus alone is sufficient for salvation and godliness. Ralph Erskine writes, "The believer, being married to Christ [union with Christ-J.F.], is both justified and sanctified," (*Gospel Sonnets*).

The gospel alone reveals the true wisdom, righteousness and holiness of God. Concerning the difference between a legalist and a gospel-driven Christian, the great Scottish preacher Ralph Erskine writes, "seeing he (the legalist-J.F.) hath taken up with self-righteousness, it is his all, it is his happiness, it is his husband, it is his God. But the language of the evangelical Christian, who is dead to the law, is, O for Christ! O for a day of power! O to be wrapt up in the covenant of grace! to get an omnipotent power, determining me to comply with the gospel-offer." The simple

message of Christ as delivered by the Apostles is the only solid root and spring of true righteousness, heart-holiness, and practical godliness.

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