

Titus 1:10-16 | For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Titus 1:10-16 | Crete

Last week John wonderfully walked us through Paul's instruction to Titus regarding the type of men who are to be appointed as elders in Crete. They reflect in their lives the fruit of the Spirit and bear out their good leadership in the home that can then apply to the church. The need for these men to be sound in doctrine and capable of rebuking false teaching is shown in the difficult circumstances they will be brought into as they lead the church in Crete. Crete is in need of good men to lead because there exists a deep cultural corruption in Crete which has made its way into the church.

In this passage Paul uses some of his harshest language to describe the Cretans as he calls for them to be rebuked sharply. Why this need for such sharp rebuke? Freedom. The corrupted character of Crete which is infecting the church is not the final problem, but is rather the means. By their wicked character they bring in false teaching which enslaves the members of the Church in Crete. Thus Paul understands that they need men of good character which God uses as the means by which the freedom Christ purchased at the cross for his people will be preserved in the life of the church. At the end of today's text Paul describes the doctrine which is being corrupted by this wicked character he says.

Titus 1:15 | To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

When the church was coming of age under the law distinctions were made among creation as to that which was clean to consume and that which was defiled. The Christian churches on the island of Crete, as with much of the churches in the first century had grown out of the Jewish synagogues. Therefore in many of the churches there is an attempt to syncretize the clean and unclean distinctions of the ceremonial law with Christian freedom that had been fully procured in Christ. But beyond the ceremonial distinctions of the law, the pharisaical tendency to expand the law to include stricter man made regulations was deeply present. We see Christ himself standing

in opposition to these traditions of men which were granted saving power by their advocates. Christ teaches:

Mark 7:15 | There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”

Paul understands the stakes are the sufficiency of Christ for our salvation, and a true understanding of sin. You can almost always tell a non-Christian system of salvation because it idolizes one aspect of creation while demonizing another aspect of creation. But this neglects the reality that all the corruption of creation flows from the sinfulness of the human heart, and therefore all the rescue of creation comes from the redemption of humanity which is only accomplished in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

So you can see how these free Christians were becoming bound by man made religion which is useless to save and creates idols out of aspects of creation, like ones own religiosity or submission to manmade religion which do not create freedom but slavery.

Why would men of corrupted nature such as the Cretans were, create further regulations to deny the liberty of the Christian? Because they wanted to take advantage of the weak for their own selfish gain. If Christ alone is Lord of the conscience than no other man can be. You see this is the difference between a cult and the church of Christ. The cult leader ultimately calls you to follow him, the church leader ultimately calls you to follow Christ. Before Christ we all freely bow because only he has the right to tell us right, wrong, true & false. Only Christ is Lord of the conscience. (WCF XX). Christian freedom is on the line in Crete.

1. Call to Rebuke

Titus 1:10 | For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.

Paul here gives very similar instruction to Titus which he gives to Timothy regarding the Church in Ephesus. The difference is that to Timothy he says that there are certain ones among him who need to be rebuked toward sound doctrine but to Titus in Crete he says there are “many.” These are insubordinate, empty talkers, and deceivers. That means they are using ultimately empty language to usurp the authority of the church they are under and deceive those around them.

Paul is especially concerned with those of the circumcision party. These were the Jewish converts who demanded that Christian converts need conform to all the requirements of the ceremonial law in order to be saved, especially circumcision. Remember Titus himself is an uncircumcised Gentile convert whom this party would seek to convince is not saved and bind his conscience. But what is precious about Christ is our justification in him alone!

Titus 1:11 | They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

The threat of these false teachers is toward entire families. They are being deceived and taken advantage of, following these false teachers as though they are true and therefore being brought into deep bondage. There was a church in boulder called Resurrection Church which operated in this means, although not judaizing they demanded demonstration of spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues for salvation. The leader was an empty talker who did not preach the word but bounced around to random texts and demanded strange obedience. So many grow up in this environment and never see the true freedom of the gospel. They must be silenced.

Notice Paul is attributing malicious intent to the false teaching taking place in Crete. He says they are doing this for shameful gain, that is their own selfish purposes to take advantage of the weak to have power over them and likely wealth as well. I have heard this phrase a lot recently, “never ascribe to malice that which is adequately explained by incompetence.” Well here is another one, don’t attribute to incompetence that which can be adequately explained by present incentive structures or plainly wicked character.

2. A Shrewd hope for Crete

Titus 1:12 | One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.”

Paul is not naive as to what Titus will be up against in Crete. And he pulls a classic, “don’t take my word for it!” Approach and simply cites what they say of themselves. He quotes Epimenedes, himself from Crete, in his hymn to Zeus. But this one quote is not the only option available to Paul. (Although he seemed to like Epimenedes as he is the one who may have recommended sacrifices to the unknown God which Paul references in his sermon on the Areopagus). He could have quoted Polybius who said, “Cretans are the only ones in whose estimation no profit is ever disgraceful.” Or Cicero who said, “the Cretans consider highway robbery to be honorable.” Or referenced the verb Cretize which meant to deceive. Now we might expect Paul to say next something like, “not all Cretans.” This type of judgmental stereotyping is wrong. But he doesn’t say that, he says,

Titus 1:13 | This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,

We have internalized a deep sense of cultural relativism which says that all cultures are basically neutral and there are not better or worse cultures. Therefore character assessments cannot be made cross culturally, because we might say, this way of behaving seems bad to us but who are we to judge another persons culture? This is wrong. So Paul is not morally neutral in his assessment of cultures but he assesses by the same standard by which he himself and all people will be ultimately assessed which is the law of Christ.

Culture is not the arbiter of morality, God is. So Paul is not foolishly thinking all places are the same. No matter how nested within a societies culture and customs a sin may be this does not make it any less sinful in the eyes of the Lord.

But notice in his accurate assessment of the Cretan culture he has no less hope for them in the gospel than he would anywhere else. LRebuke them sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith.” The word of God will work in its sharpness here as it does anyone else and can draw them out of their world of lies into the truth. Here is what that might sound

Galatians 3:1 foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?
Galatians 5:2-3 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.
Galatians 5:12 I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves..

So we are not relativists, and are able to see depth of corruption even at cultural levels. But we understand that no one can be saved outside of Christ. So Paul is not naive but he is not arrogant. As he will go on to write in this letter.

Titus 3:3-5 | For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

Now that is a glorious truth worth defending. So it is worth shrewdly recognizing the ones who make it their business to promote deception in this area. And you can tell by their works.

Titus 1:16 | they profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

The task of the church is to mitigate deception for the sake of the name of Christ and the freedom of those who follow him. This is not to be done naively, like Christ Paul knows what is in man. Therefore those whom Christ purchased ought to be defended against those who would deceive them.