

Silencing Unhealthy Teaching

Titus 1:10-16

Intro: False Teaching in Our Church

“What it means to be made in the image of God is this: God the Father has a body—a physical body. And so, we are made to look like him—with physical bodies.” That is a heresy called “Anthropomorphism” that was condemned in the 4th century. It taught that the figurative physical descriptions of God in the Bible are literal. And less than a decade ago, it was taught by a leader at this church (KABC).

You know what else was taught in a Sunday School class? In John 17, where Jesus prays that believers would be one with him and the Father...that means when we become Christians, we become part of the Trinity, and therefore, we become god-like, being able to speak into existence what does not exist.

Like, health into a person’s body, rebuking their cancer. Financial blessing onto a person’s life whose fallen on hard times. We have that power because we’re God-like.

Now, lemme ask you, if you heard stuff like that taught at KABC today, would you be surprised? I hope so! WHY? Why isn't that just the normal dialogue of our members?

One major reason is: KABC is now shepherded by a plurality of godly men who are called to teach what is in line with the gospel and refute what is not. I'm not saying this to toot the horns of the elders at Kinney. I'm saying it because a plurality of qualified elders is God's design to protect and promote the true gospel. And when a church is believing the gospel rightly, they will live rightly...because belief begets behavior.

That's the whole point of the book of Titus.

[Give background] The point of this passage is simple: *Healthy churches need healthy elders to silence unhealthy teaching.* **[vv9-10, "For"]**

As John Calvin said, "A pastor needs two voices, one for gathering sheep and the other for driving away wolves." (*Calvin's Commentaries*, 361)
This passage is mainly about the need for that second voice: *rebuke*. Notice that emphasis: **[v11, silence; v13, "rebuke...sound"]**

Healthy churches need healthy elders to rebuke unhealthy teaching. (The imagery of *health* in v13, “Rebuke them that they may be *sound* in the faith.” It could be translated *healthy*, imply their teaching is *unhealthy*.)

So it needs to be silenced. Really? Is it that big of a deal? Can’t people just believe what they wanna believe? No harm, no foul? ...It is a big deal. Paul gives 5 reasons why...

Reason #1: Unhealthy teachers are prevalent. [v10, “many”] *Many* on the island of Crete and *many* in our day. Countless sermons/podcasts on social media, with the click of a button, you have instant access to all kinds of teaching that claim to be from God but are not.

Beware! Just because it makes you FEEL good doesn’t mean it IS good. So what do you need to look out for? Notice a few characteristics of the false teachers on Crete.

First, they are *insubordinate* (v10). Mark that! You’ll never find a false teacher who humbly submits to authority. They wanna be in charge;

they don't wanna be under charge. They wanna be followed; they don't wanna follow. They wanna be listened to; they don't wanna listen. They want others accountable to them; they don't wanna be held account to others.

Listen to what John said about Diotrophes, the false teacher in his day: "Diotrophes, who loves to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority...he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church." (3 Jn. 9)

He doesn't have the authority to do that!... Excommunicate church members! But he's doing it, because he is his own authority and won't submit to the authority of the apostles. Why? Because he loves to put himself first.

Mark that: pride rules the hearts of false teachers. Their motive often is to be first, at the top, exalted. That's why they are insubordinate. *A podcast came out a few years ago about a prominent pastor in America who would tell his staff who questioned him, "I'm not sure if you've notice, but I'm kind of a big deal."*

They are also (v10) *empty talkers*. They say a lot without saying much. Here's how Paul puts it in 1 Tim. 1:6-7, "Certain persons...have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions."

Often vague, unclear jargon. *I came across a quote from a podcaster who used to be a pastor. He still claims to be a Christian but believes "traditional" Christianity is not truly the way of Jesus. Here's what he said...*

"God did not create the world that you see. The end of the world is not its destruction, but its translation in heaven. And that's the journey from ego consciousness to kingdom consciousness. Kingdom consciousness allows us to collapse the duality... If you're not seeing the kingdom, then you're seeing the dream world. And so we can wake up from that dream of separation by collapsing the distance between inner world and outer world, the thought system of separation or the thought system of unity... the 3D universe that we

experience through the five senses, that's not the dream. Our interpretation of form is the dream. Your perception of form as being separate from yourself is the dream that God did not make." (Aaron Abke)

Lemme ask: Did you understand a word of that? This is empty talk. And people buy it! Because false teaching often allows the hearer to form his/her own interpretation, suiting their own desires.

It's misleading, which is the next description of these false teachers: *deceivers* (v10). They give the impression they're helping you follow Jesus or becoming a better person, but they're leading you astray. Who are they? **[v10b]**

On Crete, it was mainly, though not exclusively, false teachers from a Jewish background. That's what he means by "circumcision party." And he highlights this, not because he's got a problem with Jews (Paul himself was ethnically Jewish!), but because it gives us a hint of the kind of false teaching being espoused. It's some sort of distortion of the OT law (as we'll see).

“This unhealthy teaching is all over the island of Crete, Titus. There are *many!*” That’s why you need to install a plurality of qualified pastors to teach healthy doctrine. John Stott said, “...when false teachers increase, the most appropriate long-term strategy is to multiply the number of true teachers, who are equipped to rebut and refute error.” (pg.179) **[Why we invest in men!]**

Reason #2: Unhealthy teachers are disruptive. [v11] Their need to be *silenced* implies their teaching spreading. One person said, “...like a single drop of ink can defile and render undrinkable a pure glass of water, false teaching, even a drop, can pervert and destroy the pure gospel of grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.” (Akin, 250) That’s what’s at stake—the purity of the gospel! And when the gospel gets defiled, people get affected.

They’re “upsetting whole *families.*” The word is *households*, which could refer to each church on Crete because the churches met in houses. OR it could be literal family units. In 1 Tim. 4, they forbid marriage, perhaps telling people to get divorced. That would disrupt families.

But it also sounds like 2 Tim. 3, which describes false teachers as “those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions.” Whatever the case, false teachers disrupt unity in the church and in the home. The point is: they are divisive.

I wonder if you know: This is why Christians care so much about truth. We don't care about being right. (Some do; some have selfish motives.) But most Christians care so much about the truth because we care about people. We know what people believe affects their lives, and so we want them to believe the truth.

Holding to the purity of the gospel gives people peace. But distorting and adding to the gospel cannot bring peace. *This was a driving reason for Martin Luther walking away from the Roman Catholic church. He was a Monk whose conscience was always unsettled because he really believed the official teaching of the Catholic church that said, “Our right standing before God is ultimately decided by me: Am I good enough?”*

If that is the decisive basis of whether God will accept you, you will never be at peace. And as he read Scripture, he realized: We can never be good enough. And that's when he embraced the freeness of the purity of the [Gospel appeal].

We are zealous to protect that because we are zealous to protect your peace. But that's not what false teachers are after. **[v11b]** *Shameful* means *dishonest*. They're not being truthful, not upfront with their agenda. What agenda? Paul uses the word *gain*. That could be *financial* gain, or ANY kind of gain.

They want something from those under their teaching—money, recognition, power, control, status. There's some kind of selfish agenda. False teachers are disruptive.

Reason #3: Unhealthy teachers imbibe their sinful culture. Listen carefully to what Paul is saying in vv12-13. He's not doing sloppy stereotyping. **[vv12-13a]** Paul is quoting a 6th century BC Cretan poet named Epimenedes... who wrote that 600 years before Paul wrote this letter to Titus. And the Cretans of Paul's day still

regarded him as a prophet, which means his writings hold weight in their eyes. So for Epimenedes to that “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons,” it had credibility.

And Paul agrees, “That is true.” Now, I would ask: Were characteristics of every single Cretan? Of course not! That would’ve meant Epimenedes was condemning himself.

Plus, Paul is applying these characteristics to the false teachers in Crete, not the Christians in Crete. He’s simply painting a picture of Cretan culture. They had a reputation for not telling the truth (“liars”), for acting on their instincts and having little regard for morality (“evil beasts”), for lacking self-discipline and giving into fleshly appetites (“lazy gluttons”).

These qualities pervaded Cretan culture for centuries. If Epimenedes said this 600 years before Paul quoted and Paul confirmed it in his day, that’s a long reputation! In fact, 300 years after Epimenedes said this, someone else wrote, “Cretans are thieves from way back, pirates; they never think along legal lines.” (*Anthologia Graeca*, 7.654)

And interestingly, a 5th century (AD) dictionary (so like 350 years after Paul wrote Titus) had the word *kreetizein* in it, which meant, “to speak or act like a Cretan, to lie, deceive.”

This is what Crete was known for. And Paul knew this reputation because he spent much time on that island planting churches. And listen, if he’s just judgmentally stereotyping, he wouldn’t have risked his neck to go to them to preach the gospel! He cares for these people!

So he’s raising Titus’s antennas so that Titus feels the urgency to install godly elders. “Titus, these churches are in a culture where lying and gluttony and immorality run rampant. Don’t be surprised when people like that come into the church and try to take over!”

And that’s what happened. False teachers who imbibe the sinful culture of Crete are trying to take over the churches. That’s what they’re like! They take on the characteristics of sinful culture... which is why, if you hear a person who claims to be “speaking for God,” but what they’re saying is no different than the beliefs

and values of the culture in which they live, alarms bells should be going off.

Think of what sins pervade our culture and are accepted as normal. You can often spot a false teacher when they teach what God calls “sin” as normal. **[Appeal to non-Christians—** Christians aren’t just trying to be mean. We really care about what God thinks because God loves people and knows what’s best.]

Reason #4: Unhealthy teachers can change.

[vv13b] See the purpose of rebuke? “Don’t hold back, Titus/elders. Rebuke sharply/severely. Be firm/clear.” Why? What would expect is the reason for sharp rebuke of these insubordinate, empty-talking, deceivers who disrupt families, disunify churches, imbibe sinful culture...all because they want something for themselves—power, money, recognition?

“Rebuke them sharply!...that they may be...”
What? “Put in their place! Humiliated before all! Shown to be who they really are!” No, he says, “...that they may be sound/healthy in the faith.”

“THE faith”...he’s talking about doctrine. Paul believes they can turn from unhealthy doctrine to healthy doctrine. That’s why they need rebuke. That’s what godly, loving, clear, but FIRM/sharp rebuke is designed to do.

Get this: Rebuke ought to be out of love...even for the person who’s teaching horrible stuff and causing much disruption in the church. It’s for the purpose of seeing them become sound in the faith. It is possible! The Lord can change the heart of the most hardened through truth.

Charles Spurgeon once said of hardened hearts, “We must never cease to pray until they cease to breathe.” Maybe you think you’re in the category of one too far gone to be rescued by God from your sin. Whatever your sin, no matter how heinous or seemingly unforgiveable, Jesus Christ can save you and transform you and change and adopt you and love you.

We’re gonna hear a baptism testimony today of a person who, in human terms, was the least likely to become a Christian. Hostile to the gospel, imbedded in sinful culture...But GOD!

No one is too far gone. So we don't have to be afraid to rebuke, even sharply, if necessary. And pray the Lord uses our words to turn them from their false beliefs. What are the false beliefs of these false teachers? **[v14]**.

We're getting a better idea of what they taught. *Jewish myths*—probably fictional stories based on the OT genealogies. As Paul says in 1 Tim. 1, they “promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.” They're just speculating about stuff and it's making them wander from God's revealed Word.

That's why Paul calls this teaching *the commandments of people/men*. It's made-up stuff not from God. That's a key test! Is it from God? Can you back it up here [the Bible]? False teaching twists and deviates from the Word. BUT people can turn from it. That's why we rebuke with the truth. **[Qualify: Not only tool]**

Reason #5: Unhealthy teachers must be exposed. [v15] This verse gives us a better idea of the “commandments of men” these false teachers impose. **[v15a, “all things...nothing”]**

He's contrasting true Christians ("the pure") with these false teachers who claim to be Christians ("defiled and unbelieving"). And he says, for Christians *all things* are pure, but to this other group, *nothing* is pure. He's talking about *all things* in creation. What God has provided is *pure* in that it's to be enjoyed.

But the other group sees only impurity. In other words, they're adding rules about what you can and cannot partake in to enjoy. **[1 Tim. 4:1-5]** False teachers tend to forbid creational gifts God graciously gives to enjoy: food and sex in marriage. So in Titus 1:15, Paul is exposing who is genuine and who is not. And one tell-tale test is: the *legalism* test. False teachers often impose commandments God does not.

They think the main problem is outside of us, not inside. Jesus said in Matt. 15, "...it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person...For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person."

That's what Paul's saying in **[v15]**. If you're heart is pure—it's truly been changed by the Spirit—then you will enjoy God's gifts in creation. But if you're heart is impure—not changed by the Spirit—ironically, you'll impose self-made rules to try to make yourself pure. It's the problem of the Pharisees, who clean the outside of the cup, but inside are dirty.

Oh beware of any teaching that says our main problem is outside of us and what is outside of us makes us unclean. The Bible says our main problem is already within! And what we need is change from the inside out!

That's exactly what Paul is getting at in **[v16]**. They're putting on a good show. They're all talk, "I know God," which means they're claiming to have true knowledge of God. "We are the ones who truly know God."

But it's all external. Their hearts have not been changed. Just give it time and they will be exposed. They will deny God by their works, no matter what they say. Talk is cheap.

Conclusion

I hope you see why doctrinal protection is so important. We gotta protect the purity of the gospel so that we can promote a pure gospel which brings true peace.

It was not that long ago that false teaching was in this church. Praise the Lord, it's no longer. And may it never be again! But pray the Lord continues to raise up healthy elders who rebuke unhealthy teaching AND give good teaching so that you will keep clinging to the gospel.

That's what's at stake—the gospel. If we lose the gospel, we lose everything. So let's keep clinging to the gospel together. It is our only peace.