

Protective Leadership: *Guarding what is Precious* Titus 1:10-16

Introduction: Leaders protect. A leader must be one who sets an example, stays out in front, and cares deeply for those following, and one of the greatest means of care is protection. There is an aspect of **physical protection** for sure, though this is more a secondary issue. There is part of my heart that is grieved when my daughters get hurt physically, but I was reminded of two things as I watched my daughter emulate her father last week playing HORSE in our driveway and she stumbled and cracked her knee on the pavement: 1) I cannot always protect her from pain, 2) pain creates opportunities to learn and grow. Physical protection has a place, but is not the ultimate necessity for leaders.

Protection from deception, however, is the great responsibility of leadership. We are all prone to be "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13) and can be taken captive by philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition (Col. 2:8), knowing that there is a constant battle ground of strongholds, opinions, and arguments raised against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10:5). The battleground of the mind and heart is where the leader engages, not willing to give up any ground nor retreating in the face of opposition. I've told the story before of my dad calling me out my senior year of college when I was captivated by my own selfishness. In pursuit of a beautiful girl and wanting to be with her at a friend's wedding, I quickly neglected a family obligation up in the Bay Area, justifying my actions in my own mind (did I mention this girl was fantastic!). My dad wrote me a letter that called out my thinking and decision making, showing by Scripture and logic that I was not being respectful, nor was I acting like the man I claimed to be. Like a the honk of a horn as your falling asleep at the wheel, this opened my eyes to my rebellion and deception, and convinced me to follow through on commitments rather than following my emotions. It all worked out since I put a ring on it 17 years ago.

We ended last week looking at qualifications for elders in the church, and one of the abilities he must possess is the handling of Scripture, being an expert in teaching the mind and heart, as well as rebuking those who contradict it. This is the two-fold mandate to any spiritual leader, whether pastor, father, discipler, man or woman, or influencer: we must know God's Word well enough to proactively teach and train as well as identify, call out, and correct error that would captivate people away from the gospel. This means one of the main tasks of an elder is the far-from-glamorous task of calling out the rebellious and deceived, knowing that without the work of the Spirit through the Word, this is an impossible task, let alone an unpopular one. It is far easier to spread evil than to maintain what is good and holy and true. In order to make the truth beautiful in our lives and display that to the world, elders must be able to correct error and deal with those who spread it.

Portrait of the Messengers of False Teachers (10-14)

In the time between the founding of these churches on Crete and the arrival of Titus to "**set things in order**", false teaching was able to take up residence. There were *many*, but there does not seem to be a **ring leader** or specific insurgency, rather a loose group of selfishly motivated people teaching something short of the truth. We will start by getting a **portrait of these teachers**, and see what **protective measures Titus was to take**, and then we will **clarify the beauty in the purity of the truth**. False teaching and false teachers will always be around, so we want to learn how we deal truthfully and graciously with those who teach it.

The Makeup of the Opposition Party (10, 12-13)

For there are many who are **insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers**, especially those of the circumcision party.
...One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." ¹³
This testimony is true.

They are rebellious and insubordinate

This description begins to paint the picture of the nature of the false teachers. The very nature that they were rebellious suggests that they were coming out of the congregation of the church on Crete, since outsiders would not be rebellious against leadership, they would simply be the wicked and those not attached to the church. This means that this group of people was ultimately rebellious against the truth, since all authority comes from God, and authority in the church is delegated by God. Rebellious people are also very hard to deal with, since even when they are presented with the truth, they are inclined to defy correction as well as the teaching of clear truth. This group was operating on their **own agenda**, and though they may have claimed to have pure motives and the right to teach, they were not submissive to God's Word or leaders.

NOTE: We are called to be submissive to one another for the express reason that we have true fear and reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). A spiritually mature person is one who knows how to be submissive to all authority in his life, not just for the pleasing of man, but for the pleasure of God (1 Peter 2:18-20). Submission to authority is a test of faith, whether you believe the promises of God, as well as a test of obedience, whether you will obey from the heart, or whether we will let pride and selfishness rule.

They are mere talkers

This group of many false teachers was obviously passionate about certain information, since they were 'devoted' to Jewish myths. They were well versed in amounts of information that gave them the upper hand in conversations with others. Since they had the corner of the market on certain information, they could woo and persuade others to follow their teaching. However, since they were teaching things devoid of the truth, they were slick and smooth, but they had nothing of substance to say about the Kingdom. Since their teaching was not out of Scripture and qualified by Scripture, they knew enough to be dangerous to others.

They are deceivers

By nature, they were deceivers, since they did not lead people in the truth. We as sinful creatures are so easily deceived. We easily lie to others (1 John 1:6), ourselves (1 John 1:8), and even God (1 John 1:10). This is why Hebrews 2:12-13 calls us to exhort one another to not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, since sin will lie to us and lead us away from the truth. Deception by nature is also **subtle**. Because they were deceived themselves, they came off as genuine and passionate. They could also appeal to **idols of the heart** and present them as true. We see this in both the **prosperity gospel** as well as **therapeutic moralistic deism**. A mark of false teaching is that it contains **some truth**, but mixed with false truth and lies. This group of false teachers was teaching things that sounded like they were true, but in the end they led to a path of destruction. This is one of the main reasons Paul told Titus to make sure that he had the elders necessary to clear up deceptive teaching, since they were to give an account of men's souls (Heb. 13:17)

They are consistent with their nature (12-13a)

Paul used one of Greece's own intellectual philosophers words to describe the nature of these Cretan false teachers. The poet Epimenides was a highly respected Greek intellectual of the sixth century B.C., and in ancient times was considered to be one of the seven great wise men of Greece. He was a native of Crete, so he knew their nature as well as anyone. Their nature was that of **liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons**. They were given to their desires and pleasures, and whatever brought them instant gratification, they did. Paul used this to back up his claim and show that what had been true of six hundred years of testimony was still true in his day. These teachers in the church were not exemplifying the changed nature of a believer, but the old nature of the Cretan culture.

The Motive behind their Activity (11b)

...by teaching for **shameful gain** what they ought not to teach.

These teachers were motivated by **financial gain**, which would come out of the control of information and influence of people. Notice that they taught in homes, captivating families. Teaching ministry is not typically seen as a lucrative field, but we have seen numerous examples of those who took advantage of others in the ministry and have become wealthy (see Jim Bakker -no relation). Though pastors rightfully make a living from ministry (1 Tim. 5:17-18), shepherds were never intended to be the wealthy class. Ultimately, their motive was revealed that they were not after the best for the people but were in it for their own gain.

The Method of Delivery (11a)

... they are upsetting whole families

Most of the churches in Crete would have met in homes, since there were not church buildings like we have today. Teaching in a home engenders an amount of intimacy and loyalty, and these teachers were creating confusion, factions, and dissensions since they were teaching something different than what Paul and Scripture taught. We believe that teaching in homes is effective to connect people in relationships and to God's Word, but we also know the inherent danger behind this. There is ALWAYS potential for well meaning people to feel more loyal to a shepherding leader or his teaching than the church as a whole. Dissensions are bred out of well meaning but deceived people who follow a rebellious leader who is willing to have people follow him rather than the whole of Christ's church.

The Message that Drew People Away (14)

...not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

They had the markings of the circumcision party (10)

The fact that Paul used the term 'circumcision party' gives a big clue as to the nature of the message of the false teachers. In Acts 15, Peter and Barnabas dealt with men from Judea who claimed that unless a person was circumcised according to the custom of Moses, they could not be saved. Some of the believers from the party of the Pharisees called for converts to Christianity to keep the Law of Moses (Acts 15:5). This debate went on in Jerusalem until Peter stood up and said,

"And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.⁸ And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us,⁹ and **he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.**¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have

been able to bear? ¹¹ **But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.**"
(Acts 15:7-11)

In other words, Peter squashed any attempt to add ANYTHING to faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. In the book of Galatians, Paul opposed Peter because he began to fear the circumcision party (Gal. 2:12), and Paul reminded him that a person 'is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified (Gal. 2:16).

The circumcision party desired at some point to add works in order to gain righteousness. They at some level believed that keeping the law either granted salvation or perfected them, as opposed to the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

2. They were teaching Jewish myths

1 Timothy 1:3-4 As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, ⁴ nor to devote themselves to **myths and endless genealogies**, which promote **speculations** rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

The nature of these myths is not completely known, but it could have contained teachings of oral tradition or the study of numerology, since each Hebrew word contains a numerical value. Either way, it was myth since it sought to come up with allegorical or subjective interpretations of truth and life.

3. They were elevating man's commands to the authority of Scripture

Colossians 2:20-23 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations- ²¹ "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)- according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an **appearance of wisdom** in promoting **self-made religion** and **asceticism** and severity to the body, **but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.**

The best insight we have on what it looked like to elevate man's commands to the level of Scripture comes from Matthew 15:1-20, which also references Isaiah 29. Here Jesus faced questions from the Pharisees over the fact that Jesus and His disciples did not wash their hands before they ate. This was a tradition that was set up by the religious leaders that spoke of being **ceremonially clean**, which meant people had to do something **external to be internally clean**. Jesus responded quickly and forcefully. He told the Pharisee's:

"So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophecy of you when he said, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' (Matt. 15:6-9)

Jesus went on to explain that it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out, because out of the heart, the mouth speaks. If the heart is defiled, the man is defiled. The reality of life is not that something done externally makes clean, but something internal makes the external clean.

1 Timothy 4:1-4 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and **teachings of demons**, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ **who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods** that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,

This is the crux of the false teaching. **They were teaching a false gospel.** They were teaching a **Gospel + message**, which denied the power and work of Christ as being both complete and sufficient. **A Gospel Plus** message is not only dangerous in upsetting whole families, it falls short of teaching where salvation is found. If there is anything added to the work of Christ, any human work, it no longer becomes good news.

Gospel Plus leads to two different polarizing realities, each destructive. The first breeds **self righteousness**, believing that we did something to earn or gain salvation. This puts the emphasis on what WE DO, which means all of life has to maintain this perspective. This means we must keep up whatever artificial standard we set up for ourselves, we must hold others to it, and are tempted to conceal any failure. This is not only joyless, but it breeds **disunity**, since maintaining unity means we must give grace to others as they process life Biblically and live it out by the leading of the Spirit, which could absolutely look differently than us.

The second pole of **Gospel Plus** is a hopelessness for those who recognize and admit their sin. If I had to contribute righteousness to my salvation, an honest evaluation would have to be: ***I am in trouble!***

There is no way I can ever do enough to make up for what I've done, so forget it. This leaves us hopeless, unmotivated, and overly burdened by the weight of sin. This why a **GospelPlus** message must be silenced.

Protective Measures against False Teachers (11, 13)

Silence is Golden (11a)

They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families...

There is a time of discussion, trying to understand and put oneself in someone else's shoes, but there are other times where silence is the answer. The word used here is "*muzzle*". These teachers were to cease and desist. I remember early in my days as college pastor there were two young men who wanted to come in and "close our Bible's" and have a discussion about religion and life. For sure, there are times to engage with people in evangelism where we can discuss their theories on life, but not in teaching and training in the church. They were silenced before they could open their mouth, since that type of discussion would move people away from Christ and His Word.

Surgically Remove False Doctrine (13b)

Therefore **rebuke them sharply, that** they may be sound in the faith...

2 Timothy 2:24-26 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. **God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,** ²⁶ and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

There are two key principles in this verse. 1) The rebuke was to be swift, calculated, and exact. The word sharp was used in surgery, cutting out an abscess without damaging the tissue around. This is the only **imperative of the passage**, which gave clarity to the importance of this action to Titus. Lives were on the line, so swift surgery was needed NOW. 2) The whole point was to **redeem those who were committing the false teaching**. They were to be rebuked in order that they **would be sound in faith**. This is grace. This is supernatural love. This is so corrective to my own heart. Often we see people who oppose us as the enemy instead of those who have been deceived by our Enemy. The hope was not only to protect people from false teachers, but to protect false teachers from themselves!

Purity of the Message of True Teaching (15-16)

Tragic end of Gospel-Plus Teaching (15b-16)

...but to the defiled and **unbelieving**, nothing is pure; but both their **minds** and their **consciences** are defiled. ¹⁶ **They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.** They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work

- **GospelPlus cannot produce purity or good works**

Romans 8:8 says that “those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Hebrews 11:6 says that “without faith it is impossible to please Him.” Paul told Titus that these false teachers were exposed by their works and were unfit for any good work. By the very fact that they thought they could earn righteousness on their own meant they were **detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.**

- **GospelPlus leaves the mind and conscience defiled**

Jesus taught in Matthew 15 that if the heart of man is defiled, all of him will be defiled. These false teachers of Crete were defiled and unbelieving. In other words, they did not believe by faith that Christ had paid for their sins, taking their place on the cross. They believed that somehow they could through knowledge and work earn salvation from God

- **GospelPlus invalidates a profession of faith**

The sobering fact was this group of teachers **claimed** to know God. They claimed to be believers, and yet they were defiled and were exposed by their works. They could not live up to their profession. If someone banks on their works for salvation, they will **always** fall eternally short. In other words, not only did they claim a high view of obedience, their lifestyle could not keep up with their profession. If someone claims to have righteousness in themselves, they have put the onus on themselves to be absolutely perfect in every aspect of life, which no one can sustain.

- **GospelPlus leaves one in a state of depravity and thus hopelessness**

The tragedy is the fact that these teachers, by their belief and practice of trying to work for salvation left them in a state of depravity before God. They were detestable in His sight, and could not please Him.

Why is works righteousness so prevalent and so appealing?

This is a question we all must answer, because we are ALL prone to works righteousness, either for justification or sanctification. We each have a hard time with the fact that we have violated a holy God, and the solution for us is to entrust ourselves to Christ who took our place, and the obedience we engage in was prepared beforehand for us to do (Eph. 2:10). Paul said in Galatians 3:1-9 that we not only began by faith, but we continue by grace through faith in our walk with Christ. We live lives totally dependent on Christ alone for salvation, and totally dependent on the grace He brings to live holy lives. Anytime we begin to trust ourselves in salvation, we believe and practice a false gospel.

Freedom & Works Produced by a Whole Gospel (15a)

To the pure, all things are pure...

- **Faith in Christ alone produces a pure heart**

Hebrews 10:22 says “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our **hearts sprinkled clean** from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

1 Corinthians 6:11 says “And such were some of you. But **you were washed**, you were sanctified, your were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

When Christ saves, we are washed, purified, and have His righteousness applied to us. We now have the motivation and power to walk in obedience and have good works produced in and through us.

- **Christ alone produces good works for us (Eph. 2:8-10)**

So what qualifies us to live obediently and devote ourselves to good works? It is the gospel of Jesus alone, who not only saves but sanctifies, who declared us righteous and then is our means of righteousness.

So we stand and remind ourselves of the reality of that gospel together:

"But when the goodness and lovingkindness 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 the renewal of the Holy Spirit."

Titus 3:4-5