

Series: *Titus: The Gospel for Godly Living*
Lesson: *Dealing with Deceivers*
Text: Titus 1:10-16 (L3)
Date: Sunday, November 20, 2011

Colonial Hills
Baptist Church

Series: *Titus: The Gospel for Godly Living*
Lesson: *Dealing with Deceivers*
Text: Titus 1:10-16 (L3)
Date: Sunday, November 20, 2011

Colonial Hills
Baptist Church

Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

INTRODUCTION

Regarding the pastor's chief responsibility, Paul has written in verse 9, "Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (NASB). Paul's next major paragraph (vv. 10-16) answers the question "why?" aroused by verse 9. Why should the pastor "cling to" the faithful word? Why should he so diligently exhort people in sound doctrine? Why should he reprove those who contradict the truth? Why is this responsibility, above all others, singled out in this list of qualifications? Paul answers those questions by underlining the importance of truth-teaching, and in particular, he provides three reasons why we should so actively deal with deceivers.

Before we consider those reasons, let's examine the three phrases Paul uses to describe our active dealing with deceivers (i.e., those who contradict—the main topic in vv. 10-16). First, in verse 9, Paul obligates the pastors to "convince" those who contradict. False teachers literally "speak against" such healthy teaching that accords with God's Word, and they must be rebuked (Gk. "exposed, convicted, reproved, corrected"). The pastor cannot quietly ignore them, hoping others will follow his lead. He is obliged to verbally defend God's Word, even publicly against the opponents. Furthermore, verse 11 demands that their "mouths must be stopped." The literal idea here is that they must be muzzled. Again, they are not simply ignored or put up with—they are actively exposed and corrected. Since their deception takes a verbal form, we should seek to both silence them and respond verbally with truth. Finally, verse 13 calls us to "rebuke them sharply." This phrase gives further earnestness to this responsibility. We cannot afford to be lazy or passive in the exhortation in truth and correction of error.

Now, in verses 10-16, Paul provides three reasons why we must deal so actively and aggressively with deceivers.

THEY DECEIVE OTHERS (vv. 10-12).

God's inerrant and authoritative Word describes three aspects of these deceptive teachers.

1. *Their behavior (vv. 10, 12)*

These false teachers are "unruly" or rebellious and insubordinate (cf. II Timothy 3:13). The word has to do with the submission or subjection of one object under another (cf. Hebrews 2:8; also cf. its antonym in Romans 8:20; Philippians 3:21; Ephesians 1:22). This subordination is completely thrown off by these teachers, which can only arise from their pride and self-sufficient arrogance (cf. I Timothy 6:4-5). In I Timothy 1:9, this word is joined with the idea of lawlessness, suggesting that the primary object these teachers are rebelling against is the authority of the truth of God's Word. No wonder they don't teach God's Word; they refuse to submit their own selves to it. God's Word demands a standard that they will not submit to; thus, they reinterpret the Scriptures to deceive others into their own proclaimed moral standards and responsibilities.

This was the norm within the Cretan culture. In the 6th Century BC, the poet Epimenides, a native of Crete, assessed his own countrymen as being "always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies [or lazy gluttons]" (v. 12). 600 years later, Paul affirmed that this stereotype was still true, and it had begun to characterize the church through the influence of these insubordinate false teachers.

These false teachers are also described as "vain [or empty] talkers." What makes their speaking so meaningless, according to I Timothy 1:4-6, is that they have turned aside from the instruction that furthers God's redemptive plan and produces a godly live, giving themselves instead to those things that are indeed useless. MacArthur describes these empty talkers:

Their talk is often captivating and persuasive. Their words are smooth and they cleverly disguise their falsehoods in terms that make them seem truthful, frequently using biblical words and phrases that are distorted and taken out of context. But what they teach is bereft of truth. Their preaching and teaching is based on the musings of their own warped imaginations, speculations, and knowledge set up against the Word of God.¹

A summary description in verse 10 is that these men are "deceivers," being energized by the great deceiver himself (cf. I Timothy 4:1-2; cf. James 3:6). Unfortunately, these men have never lacked an audience in the church. II Timothy 4:3-4 mourns concerning the church, "For the time will come

when they will not endure sound doctrine, but...shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears [or wanting their ears tickled], and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." Such deception from His leaders is repulsive and condemned by God (cf. Jeremiah 14:14; 23:2, 13-14, 21, 32). Therefore, just before talking about our speech, a warning is issued to every "would-be" teacher in James 3:1, "My brethren, be not many masters [or teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."

One particular deception these false teachers spread is suggested by the phrase "especially they of the circumcision" (v. 10). This most likely refers to the Judaizers, those Jewish "Christians" who were attempting to obligate all believers to the Jewish ceremonial laws and traditions. While the exact form of heresy is not given here, verse 14 contributes to the idea that some kind of legalistic works-salvation or works-sanctification was being promoted. These false teachers even affected Peter for a time, until he was sharply corrected by Paul (cf. Galatians 2:11-12). While the work of Christ certainly produces a distinct lifestyle as that individual obeys Christ (cf. Titus 2:1-10; 3:1-2, 8, 14), in the gospel of grace there is no place for earning God's favor through self-effort (cf. Titus 2:11-14; 3:3-7). Our favorable standing before God was earned for us by Christ and is ours in Him. May we never re-burden ourselves or others with self-effort (cf. Acts 15:10-11) like these deceivers.

2. *Their motive (v. 11d)*

These men live so rebelliously and teach so deceitfully in the sight of God "for filthy lucre's sake" or for the sake of shameful and disgraceful gain. This is a direct affront to the pastoral qualifications in vv. 5-9 in which we learned that the elder must "not be given to filthy lucre [or dishonest gain]" (v. 7). Rather, these men distortedly determine to use godliness as a means of gain (I Timothy 6:5), missing altogether the gain that God would have them experience (I Timothy 6:6). In their motivation, these men are in direct disobedience to I Peter 5:2, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre."

3. *Their effect (v. 11a-c)*

Doctrinal deception is always destructive. Moving away from truth is always a movement towards ruin. And false teachers are never content with their own personal calamity, as they always take people with them. These deceptive teachers "subvert whole houses" or ruin entire households. Rather than publicly teaching in church meetings where mature and discerning believers may recognize and contend with them, these deceivers slyly went from house-to-house and person-to-person to amass a following. "An isolated small group such as a single family...not

¹ MacArthur, John. Titus in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996. P. 58.

only is less likely to include a biblically grounded believer but also, because of its size, is often more easily intimidated. It is largely for those reasons that many cults focus on person-to-person and door-to-door ministries to capture converts.”²

Notice the New Testament’s consistent warnings against the individual deception and ruin created by these false teachers. II Timothy 3:6—“For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly [or weak] women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts.” II Timothy 2:14, 16—“Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words [which leads] to no profit, but to the subverting [or ruin] of the hearers...But shun profane and vain babblings, for they will increase unto more ungodliness.” II Peter 3:16—“They that are unlearned and unstable wrest [or distort] [Paul’s teachings], as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.”



How may believers be individually led astray today? *cults, discontented believers in the church – church splits, enamored with certain personalities within broader evangelicalism, psychiatry/psychology,*³ etc.

Application: The application has already been made concerning the paramount responsibility of the church to guard and teach the truth (Titus 1:3, 9; cf. II Timothy 3:15).⁴ Pastors must cling to the faithful message of God’s Word in personal study and practical living so that they may publicly give exhortation in healthy teaching (Titus 1:9). And because of the deceptive and subtle nature of false teaching (see MacArthur’s quote above), pastors must be careful to expose falsehood (v. 9) and explain God’s truth expositionally (i.e., verse-by-verse, paragraph-by-paragraph, passage-by-passage) in context (i.e., not proof-texting or personal preference). MacArthur stresses, “Spiritual leaders are to oppose false teachers by overpowering them with the truth taught so clearly, precisely, and powerfully that those who spread error hide in humiliation when their falsehood is exposed.”⁵ Church leaders should be careful to simply be the spokespersons for God, proclaiming only the message that He has already issued in Scripture (i.e., never their own musings—again, see MacArthur’s quote above). Their desire should be for the experience of Ezekiel to be theirs—“And I will make thy tongue cleave to the roof of thy mouth that thou shalt be dumb...But when I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, ‘Thus saith the Lord God’” (Ezekiel 3:26-27). And when they do open their mouths to proclaim the declarations of Almighty God, they should be earnest to “declare...all the counsel of God” in order to spare the

² Ibid., p. 60.
³ Cf. John White quote in Ibid., pp. 49-50.
⁴ Cf. John Stott quote in Ibid., p. 50.
⁵ Ibid., p. 55.

flock (Acts 20:27-32). Indeed the pastoral leadership of the church should always be compelled with the divine obligation to “preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (II Timothy 4:2). Therefore, just as in Acts 6, “It is not reason [or right] that [the pastors] should leave the Word of God, and serve tables” (v. 2). No, they must “give [themselves] continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word” (v. 4), and the result may be that recorded in verse 7—“the Word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied.”

Additionally, having understood the individual focus of these deceivers (i.e., recruiting house-to-house, individual-to-individual), we must make application to each believer. Believers must be plugged-in to the truth-teaching ministry of the local church (v. 9) and the sharpening accountability of its fellowship (Hebrews 3:13). The preaching and educational ministries of the church are not just traditional; they are foundational. Wise believers will make learning the Word of God with their fellow believers a priority for themselves and their family. Furthermore, believers must personally be interacting with the truth of God’s Word in their daily lives (II Timothy 2:15ff). When the pastor or other believers are not there to stand with you on truth, you must have the wherewithal (both mentally and volitionally) to stand yourself! This requires diligent personal effort to “be sound in the faith” (v. 13). The pastoral qualification of verse 9 is an example for all believers in the church. Don’t cut corners; your spiritual well-being and destiny and that of your family is at stake (v. 11).



How can individual believers be preparing themselves against the onslaught of individual deception? *Devotions, Bible study, prayer, small groups, family devotions, accountability*

Transition: When it comes to dealing with deception in the church, we cannot afford to be careless or naïve. The “father of all lies” has entered in to his own deceivers who seek to undermine the truth, and thus destroy God’s work. We’ve learned first that these deceivers work to deceive others. Secondly, we notice from verses 13-14 that these false teachers are willingly devoid of truth.

THEY ARE DEVOID OF TRUTH (vv. 13-14).

Their subverting of others is not accidental or careless. Rather, they have set themselves against truth. In verse 9, Paul states the goals for the truth-teaching ministry of the church—positively, to exhort believers in correct doctrine; negatively, to refute those who contradict that doctrine. In verses 13-14, Paul builds upon that second goal, demonstrating that the ultimate desire is for the restoration of that deceiver. However, even in this statement of intent is a revelation of the heart of these false teachers. They deceive others because they have chosen to be devoid of truth.

According to verse 13, these false teachers were “giving heed” to “Jewish fables” and “commandments of men who reject the truth.” “Giving heed” has the idea of “turning one’s mind to; paying attention to; following; occupying oneself with; devoting oneself to.” In other words, these issues become their hobby horses and soap boxes; these are the issues that define them; these are the issues that occupy their research and energies; these are the issues that they are willing to die for. Well, are these noble issues? Are these fundamental principles that must be guarded and contended for? No. Verse 14 suggests that both areas of interest for these deceivers are errors.

1. *They give themselves to foolish discussions.*

First, they willingly occupy themselves with foolish discussions, here summarized under the phrase “Jewish fables.” While the exact myths/legends are not mentioned here, some cross references underline the wisdom in abstaining from preoccupation with these meaningless issues.

- *I Timothy 1:3-4*—“Instruct certain people not to spread false teachings, nor to occupy themselves with myths and interminable genealogies. Such things promote useless speculations rather than God’s redemptive plan that operates by faith” (NET).
- *I Timothy 4:7*—“Reject those myths fit only for the godless and gullible, and train yourself for godliness” (NET).
- *II Timothy 4:4*—“They will turn away from hearing the truth, but on the other hand they will turn aside to myths” (NET).
- *I Peter 1:16*—“For we did not follow cleverly concocted fables when we made known to you the power and return of our Lord Jesus Christ” (NET).
- *I Timothy 6:3-5*—“If someone spreads false teachings and does not agree with sound words (that is, those of our Lord Jesus Christ) and with the teaching that accords with godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing, but has an unhealthy interest in controversies and verbal disputes. This gives rise to envy, dissension, slanders, evil suspicions, and constant bickering by people corrupted in their minds and deprived of the truth” (NET).
- *I Timothy 6:20-21*—“Avoid the profane chatter and absurdities of so-called ‘knowledge.’ By professing it, some have strayed from the faith” (NET).

Possible issues that would fall into this category of foolish discussions are genealogical speculations, numerology, certain prophetic interpretations, certain scientific or astrological explanations of various passages, legends and myths, etc. Since we have a “more sure word of prophecy” in the clear revelation of God’s Word, we should “take heed” to it, understanding and obeying the Holy Spirit’s message in it (I Peter 1:19-21). Ironically, while these deceivers give themselves to the error of



What might some more modern-day examples of foolish discussions be?

discovering some “deeper meaning” in the things of God, God’s responsibility for His shepherds is that they simply continue in the faithful Word as it has been taught since it was originally given (Titus 1:9).

2. *They give themselves to legalistic teachings.*

Secondly, these deceivers devote themselves to legalistic teachings or “the commandments of men.” An equivalent phrase is used by Jesus in Matthew 15:9 and Mark 7:7 and by Paul in Colossians 2:22 to describe the set of man-made rules and regulations that had replaced what God actually required and had become the measuring stick for spirituality. Rather than “the simplicity that is in Christ” (II Corinthians 11:3-4), these deceivers continued the “legalistic ordinances and standards...that added to and often contradicted or nullified Scripture.”⁶ Due to the parallels between Titus 1:14-15 and I Timothy 4:1-4, it is possible that a couple of the specific legalistic teachings Paul had in mind were the forbidding of marriage and the prohibition against eating certain foods. This legalistic error is worse than the foolish discussions mentioned above, because such legalistic teaching actually constitutes another gospel, the proclaimers of which are accursed (Galatians 6:1-10).

These deceitful teachers give themselves to these errors because they have turned themselves away from truth (v. 14; cf. I Timothy 2:4; Mark 7:13). The gospel truth that is so foundational to the church’s mission (Titus 1:1-4) has been forthrightly rejected by these deceives. Thus, without any foundation of truth themselves, they offer nothing beneficial to the body of Christ. Their personalities may be gregarious, their preaching eloquent, and their dialogue witty; but their lives are useless (cf. v. 16), because they are devoid of the truth.

Application: Believers should be careful to avoid the two errors ascribed to these deceivers. On the one hand, Christians should give themselves to know and obey the clear teaching of God’s Word, accepting “those things that are revealed” (Deuteronomy 29:29). Speculations and endless discussions should be replaced with gospel-centered considerations (i.e., the “knowledge of the truth” that leads to godliness, v. 1; the “faithful Word as it has been taught,” v. 9).

On the other hand, believers should be careful to avoid adding to the revelation of God’s Word and reapplying a burden that was removed in the gospel (cf. Acts 15:10-11; Colossians 2:20-23). Favor with God is a gift of the gospel, freely given to us in Christ. Such a position can never be earned or altered, although an understanding of this



In what ways might we practice legalism in our lives today? *Thinking we can earn or lose God’s favor based on our obedience/disobedience today; judging others’ spirituality based on external standards, etc.; too much of a Lordship salvation emphasis*

⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

reality should drastically change one's life and produce godliness. More will be said about legalism in our final point.

Furthermore, if the primary problem of false teachers is that they are devoid of the truth, then their greatest need is not to be amiably loved more or patiently put up with or warmly buddied up with. If we truly care about them, too, then we will "speak the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) and "rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (Titus 1:13). When the truth is not accepted, error must be separated from, in order that the truth may be underlined and not blurred (cf. II Corinthians 6:14-18; II Thessalonians 3:6, 9, 14-15; Philippians 2:15-16).

Transition: So far, we have noted two reasons why we should actively and decisively deal with deceivers among the flock of God. First, false teachers deceive others; secondly, false teachers are willingly devoid of truth themselves. Finally, we consider verses 15-16 and learn that false teachers deceive themselves.

THEY DECEIVE THEMSELVES (vv. 15-16).

This point should be a bit self-evident after the former, but it serves to underline the tragedy of these deceivers. Having "given themselves" to error and to its dissemination, they will eventually reap the condemnation of it.

1. *Their hearts are corrupt.*

The fundamental problem with these deceivers' legalism is now revealed. Paul proverbially states, "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure" (v. 15). Purity before God is not attained by observing any set of regulations and procedures and avoiding that which was considered evil. In other words, external cleanliness does not lead to a clean heart in the sight of God (cf. Luke 11:37-41; Matthew 23:26). Rather, purity first starts in the heart. "When a person is pure in heart and mind, his perspectives on all other things are pure, and that inner purity always produces outer purity."⁷ Such purity comes only through the application of God's righteousness to that individual when he/she expresses faith in Christ (cf. Romans 3:21ff).

Therefore, in their legalistic gospel, these deceives completely missed the starting point. Rather than proclaiming the gift of God's righteousness which is accepted by faith and will produce both positional (internal) and practical (external) purity, these false teachers taught a list of regulations

to conform to, which, they proclaimed, would earn favor with God and purity before Him. MacArthur goes on to explain this legalism:

Jewish legalism, like every other form of legalism, presumed that a person can make himself acceptable to God by meticulously observing certain ceremonies and traditions that were considered good and obligatory and by just as meticulously avoiding those that were considered evil. The idea [is] that, by doing or not doing certain things, a person is able, by his own power and merit, to please and reconcile himself to God...The basic heresy of every false religious system is works righteousness. Paul describes those who promote that foundational heresy in his letter to the church at Rome, saying of them, "For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3).⁸

That was the very problem of these deceivers, for they were still "unbelieving" and thus still "defiled" in mind and conscience. In other words, "all their perspectives and actions are infected with their inner defilement"⁹ no matter how rigorous their regulative lifestyles may be (cf. Matthew 15:11, 15-20). Their deceptive teaching, then, is simply a manifestation of a still-corrupt heart. While thinking that they are teaching wisdom, they are self-deceived and proclaiming folly. Meanwhile, their legalistic teaching masks the sinfulness of their own heart and blinds them to their own need for God's gracious salvation.

2. *Their professions are undermined.*

Therefore, these false teachers are the most deceived of any, for while "they profess that they know God...in works they deny Him" (v. 16). While only God can perfectly evaluate a person's heart, professors can betray their unbelieving and corrupt interiors by the way they live (cf. II Timothy 3:5; Matthew 7:16). Just as truth leads to godliness as the proof of faith (Titus 1:1), so un-truth leads to godlessness as the indicator of unbelief. So, they confess (lit.) God verbally, but repudiate Him actively, and God will therefore reject them (cf. Matthew 7:21-23; 10:33).

So, while they legalistically teach conformity to some extra-biblical regulatory system, God sees these deceivers as "abominable and disobedient and unto every good work reprobate." Rather than earning His favor, they cultivate His wrath. These teachers are abominable or detestable, having therefore no place in heaven (cf. Revelation 21:27). They are disobedient, which according to the theme of Titus, is

⁷ Ibid., p. 64.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 65-66.

⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

inconsistent with a truth- and faith-filled life and is therefore indicative of unbelief and condemnation (cf. Ephesians 2:2; 5:6). Consequentially, they are disqualified for any good deed (cf. II Timothy 3:8). Since they have denied the righteousness of God through faith alone in Christ's grace alone, they are unable in any way to please God. Their legalism has not availed. Their professions are thus undermined, and they are self-deceived. Note the sobering ironies:

*While they appear to seek God, following rituals of outward purity, before the Almighty they are disgusting. While they demand strict obedience to rules and regulations, before God they remain defiant. Though they trumpet their actions, Christ declares them unfit and useless.*¹⁰

Application: A most sobering reason that we should be teaching truth against the onslaught of false teaching is that those false teachers have been blinded by the god of this world so that they will not believe (II Corinthians 4:4). So, while we should be quick to repudiate and reject their teaching, we should be just as swift to share the gospel. False teaching starts in the heart, and according to these last two verses, the only solution to the self-deception of false teachers is an understanding and personalization of the gospel message. God has ordained the gospel to be the power of God to break through the blindness and provoke faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 1:15-17). Jesus acknowledged, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). The church, then, must be careful to guard and proclaim the gospel message above all. This is the very heart of "the faith" for which we must earnestly contend (Jude 3).

All believers are wise to read these two verses and then evaluate their personal profession. We must be assured that our hearts have been cleansed by Christ; our lifestyle should then authenticate that relationship with God (cf. Titus 2:1-10), for while the works of a deceiver reveal a defiled and unbelieving heart (1:16), there are specific works that fit with a cleansed and believing heart (2:1). You should ensure that you have not fallen pray to the legalistic thinking of false teaching, and you should apply yourself to truth so that you may be "sound in the faith" (v. 13). Truth and godliness must start in the heart through the gospel!

CONCLUSION

In only the first 16 verses of this little letter, we are once again reminded that truth is not to be taken lightly, and the faith is not to be contended for

¹⁰ Larson, Knute. *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*. Vol. 9 of *Holman New Testament Commentary*. Holman Reference. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000. Pp. 347-48.

passively. Where truth is on the line, lives are at stake; where truth has been rejected, foolishness and legalism are usually symptoms; and where truth has been denied, such heart-blindness must be confronted with the gospel.

The only way to cut through darkness is with light; likewise, the only way to deal with deception is with truth.¹¹

¹¹ David Campbell provides the following application, tying in the lessons learned to the previous section dealing with church leadership: "What was Paul's strategy in the face of spreading error?" asks John Stott. 'It was this: when false teachers increase, we must multiply the number of true teachers.' That must be the church's strategy today. The great need of the hour is for the kind of sound, able, mature, and godly leaders that Paul has described for us earlier in the chapter—men who are self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined; men who hold fast the truth and who are able to encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. And that being so, we need, among other things, earnestly to petition the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, for, according to Ephesians 4, such men are His gift. It is He who for the good of His church gives such men. In an age of abounding false doctrine, therefore, it is to Him that the church needs earnestly to look for the help it so desperately needs" (Campbell, David. *Opening Up Titus*. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2007. Pp. 42-43).