

## HOW YOUR LIFE CAN MODEL THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Teaching Through Titus Verse by Verse - Part four

Sunday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, a.m. - Teaching #1504

### YOU BECOME WHAT YOU LEARN - THE DANGER OF FALSE TEACHING IN THE CHURCH

**Titus 1:10-16** - "For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. [11] They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. [12] One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." [13] This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, [14] not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. [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. [16] They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work."

In our last message we looked at the *kind of leader God uses*. Paul was very careful to outline the kind of character these new leaders were to possess. Titus wasn't just to pick anybody. These leaders had to *exemplify* in their lives the kind of transformed life they *taught* to others. Remember, the *godly example of the leader is the gift of hope to those who follow*. The leader's transformed life says, "*What I'm teaching really works. I know it will work for you because, as you can see, it has already worked for me by God's amazing grace!*"

Now, if we lived in a perfect world, that would be all leaders would need to do in any church. In fact, the philosophy of the day is if you educate people - show them the right way - they will embrace it. But that doesn't factor in the reality of the Fall. We don't live in a perfect world. Every Scriptural ministry will be challenged in this world. That's why the last line we studied last week emphasized the fact that any leader in any church would have to be able to "*rebuke those who contradict it*" (1:9b). In every one of his letters Paul *assumed* good teachers would be followed by bad. There would always be more than one message reaching the church. It was a given.

However difficult it may be, however unpopular such refuting is, the gospel - the gospel of *hope and eternal life and grace* - is too precious to be left up for grabs. Only a *pure* gospel is any good. And so leaders must make sure that the integrity of the Scriptural message is never compromised or diluted or added to. And, in this fallen world, that will always involve *refuting* or *rebuking* false teaching - right in the church.

#### 1) WHEREVER SCRIPTURAL TRUTH IS PROCLAIMED COUNTERFEIT TRUTH WILL POP UP WITH CERTAINTY

**Titus 1:10-11** - "For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. [11] They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach."

Underscore that word "*many*." Paul is not addressing one or two isolated problems in the church at Crete. Titus needed to move quickly in the choosing and developing of leadership precisely because there were *so many* false teachers influencing *so many* young Christians.

Nor was this a problem peculiar to the church at Crete. As I said earlier, if you look at Paul's closing words to almost any church in the New Testament you'll find a common thread of concern and instruction:

**2 Timothy 4:1-2** - "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: [2] preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."

I know of only one other place in the Scriptures where Paul takes on such an oath of seriousness. Timothy is a *young* pastor. It wouldn't come naturally for such a young leader to take on false teaching with reproof and rebuke. That's why Paul *binds Timothy with such strong words*. "Whatever else you do Timothy, over-ride your natural tendency to tolerate false doctrine. Never put your own popularity first. Put loyalty to truth first. *Promise me* you'll always be faithful to deal firmly with false teaching!"

About a year and a half after Paul wrote those words to Titus and Timothy we have these words from the apostle Peter: **2 Peter 2:1-3** - "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. [2] And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. [3] And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep."

Then we can look at some of Paul's closing words to the church at Rome: **Romans 16:17-18** - "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. [18] 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 naive."

Then he wrote these parting words to the Ephesian elders: **Acts 20:29-30** - "I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them."

It would be very easy to argue that while *we* would fear that the greatest danger to the church was a lack of *love or unity*, Paul would say that the greatest danger to the last days church was a lack of *discernment and sound doctrine and Scriptural truth*.

Church, learn to **treasure truth**. Jesus said the **truth would make us free**. Error is never merely intellectual. Error in spiritual matters always costs. It always enslaves. Learn not only to be **disciplined** in grasping truth. That's a good **starting point**. But mature saints should actually come to **love** the quest for truth. That's why the Psalmist always likened the consuming of God's Word, not to **spinach**, but to **honey**. Learn to read the Bible in a deeper way than you watch videos. Learn to enjoy reading slowly - taking time over each word. Go for **depth**, not **speed**. Take note of each idea and expression.

## 2) THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY AND DISCIPLES MUST GROW UP IN BOTH

This relates to the first point. Because false teaching is so **dangerous** and so **common**, leaders must mature spiritually in **two different ways at the same time**: Leaders must, first of all, grow up in **holy living**. Secondly, leaders must grow up in **discerning competing truth claims**. Learn to say to yourself frequently, "**If this is true, than that can't be.**"

Most Christians in today's church are far more interested in the former than the latter. We all want to be godly in our actions. We all want **practical** truth. We want to know how to overcome temptation and build strong marriages and raise our children in the ways of the Lord. We want to know how to keep our thoughts pure, witness with confidence and effectiveness.

In fact, if you've pastored a church for any length of time, you frequently encounter different objections to the ways in which we do church. There are people who are always upset whenever they feel things aren't **practical** enough. We all want stuff that is quickly and easily geared into daily living.

And I think I understand that concern. We're all too busy to waste time gathering doctrinal truths that are only going to gather dust on some back shelf of our minds. But there's a problem with that kind of thinking. The appetite that makes **practical** truth **precious** is the very same appetite that makes **doctrinal** truth **necessary**.

The desire to be holy without learning sound doctrine is the same kind of desire as the desire to read great novels without learning the alphabet or punctuation. There is no future in that. Remember, religious practices not anchored to Biblical doctrine will almost always be discarded by the next generation.

The gospel **has** precious power to transform lives. But only a **true, doctrinally digested, pure** gospel can do that. Once the content goes out of the gospel - once **sound doctrine** dies - there will only be a few remaining relics - old religious habits that look like spiritual life, but will never make it through the hands of one more generation of children.

You can't maintain mature **holiness** without mature **understanding**. The doctrine cherished in the mind provided the  **motive** for holiness lived out in the life. That's why, when Paul wants to make people **holy** the first thing he does is make them **pursue truth**:

**Ephesians 4:11-16** - "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain 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, [14] **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. [15] Rather, speaking the **truth** in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

Please don't miss Paul's point. He talks a great deal in those verses about the beauty of **unity** and **love** and **ministry**. There's nothing cold or academic in his description of healthy church life. But there's another important point. People can't experience those beautiful things if they follow false doctrine. People will just be "**tossed to and fro by the waves**" (14) if they don't **ingest** doctrinal truth and **resist** error. Everything beautiful and powerful in the Christian life hinges on the love of and growth in doctrinal truth.

How much you receive God's guidance is indirectly related to how you think about the Trinity. How you resist temptation is tied indirectly to how well you understand the doctrine of sin and the Fall. How you raise your children for Jesus is linked to how well you know the teaching of Jesus in the gospels.

Here's a good test. What **is** your attitude to false teaching and strange ideas? Deep in your heart, do you feel it is more loving to tolerate false teaching? Do you feel Jesus would be more pleased if we all just got together, did away with anything that divides or offends, and just learned to live and let live? Do you feel, when it comes to Scriptural issues, everyone has a right to his or her own opinion? If you do, you do not genuinely love people. Because their **opinions** will never set them free. Only gospel **truth** sets people free - even very sincere people.

I'll tell you what Paul says must happen in a healthy church. First, people must **know the truth so well they can spot error when it arises**. And second, false teaching must be **silenced**. It's right there, plainly commanded in **verse 11**. The devil has room for all sorts of false ideas. Jesus doesn't.

### 3) FALSE TEACHING FREQUENTLY SPREADS APART FROM THE MAIN CHURCH SERVICE SETTING

**Titus 1:10-11** - "For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. [11] They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach."

Because these churches were very new they were also very unstructured. It's very easy to look back on them with rather romantic rather than practical eyes. Because they were very loosely connected people were very vulnerable to whomever came into their home with a new idea or revelation or message. So the errors spread outside of the main church gathering. The error spread from house to house.

Usually, though not always, people who wouldn't openly say the same things publicly felt braver to say them one on one. People are usually more vulnerable to false doctrine in smaller groups than larger ones. It is no accident that groups like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons do their best work *one to one - door to door*. They want your ear away from the protection and inspection of the rest of the body of Christ.

In any church - in *this* church - make sure that anything you hear in smaller settings lines up with the public teaching of the Scriptures. Make sure what you're putting into your mind can stand the test of public scrutiny and examination.

### 4) THE NATURE OF MOST FALSE TEACHING IN THE CHURCH THEN AND NOW IS SOME FORM OF A DENIAL OF GOSPEL GRACE

**Titus 1:13-14** - "This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, [14] not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth."

Paul gave another clue about these false teachers earlier in **verse 10** when he identified most of them as "*those of the circumcision*." These were *Jewish* believers. They probably came and made some kind of profession of faith in Jesus Christ, but then wanted to *add* some of the Old Testament ceremonial regulations and restrictions *in addition to* simple faith in Jesus Christ.

So Paul says they are *gospel-plus* teachers. Faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross is fine. But something else is needed. Paul says they wanted to add "*Jewish myths*" and "*the commandments of people*" (14).

There is an important point here. Most false teaching you will encounter won't be a direct *denial* of what you already believe. Most false teachers will be very embracing and polite about your love for Jesus. False teaching will always *begin* with what you already believe but *supplement* it with additional truth of equal or greater importance.

There will always be *additional revelation* from false teachers. This kind of error has become rampant in many charismatic circles. I get phone calls all the time about what some new leader, usually a modern day, self-proclaimed prophet, had just received for the church.

You can do exactly what I do with these teachings. I open my New Testament. If Jesus didn't say it, or Paul, or Peter, or one of the other apostles, then I don't need it. It's just that simple. I don't need anything new. I'm suspicious of anything new. I don't need anything additional. The gospel is still the power of God unto salvation. The Holy Spirit still fills and empowers exactly as He did in the early church. I'm just not looking for anything else.

Please don't misunderstand. There certainly *are*, and *ought* to be gifts of prophecy in the church. But they should *apply* a Biblical principle to a specific local church situation. They never *add* to the revelation of God's Word.

### 5) THE TRAGIC RESULT OF FALSE TEACHING

**Titus 1:15-16** - "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. [16] They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work."

These are very important verses. I want to talk about what they *do* mean and what they *don't* mean. Let me start with the latter.

Here's what they *don't* mean. When Paul says, "*To the pure, all things are pure...*," he doesn't mean Christians can do whatever they want without becoming contaminated by sin. Some teachers and some Christians give the impression that only immature Christians worry about the strictures of worldliness. But we know better than this because Paul *did* warn that Christians *are* influenced by bad company and bad examples:

**1 Corinthians 15:33** - "Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

**Romans 6:13** - "Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness."

So it *is* very important that Christians live with caution and carefulness. It's a terrible mistake to **presume** on grace.

Now, here's what Paul **does** mean when he says **"...to the pure all things are pure."** He means if Jesus has a hold of your heart, if you truly love Him with all your being, that inward purity will spill over into your outward actions. That's why, as Jesus said, the whole law is summed up - kept - in the commandment to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbor as yourself. ***If you do those things properly you will keep every other law God wants you to keep.***

Jesus said if the **inside** of the dish was clean, the **outside** would be clean also. That's the truth Paul is underscoring in a nutshell. On the other hand, if the heart is **unbelieving** (unbelieving is the way Paul describes the person who rejects Jesus Christ as Lord), then nothing else can make up for that tragic sin: **Titus 1:15b-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."**

This is the message of the whole New Testament. This is why religious activity without Jesus Christ is never going to take anybody to heaven. Apart from Jesus Christ in the heart, no amount of works (like the Jewish false teachers were advocating) will cleanse the **mind** or the **conscience**(15).

This is why Jesus came. He came into a world full of passionately religious people. But those religious observances couldn't bring people to God. Paul, the one who wrote these words, knew what he was talking about. He wrote from his own frustrating struggle to be clean by outward religious observances:

**Philippians 3:4-9** - **"...though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith...."**

So Paul knows of what he speaks. He had misplaced his confidence for righteousness for a long time. He knew what it was to be finally released and transformed inwardly to love God and experience His grace and empowering through Jesus Christ.

**Romans 10:3** - **"For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness."**

This is Paul's warning throughout the whole New Testament. He is writing here about the Jews. But these words describe the root of **all false religion and teaching**. Man's religion is man's way to **establish his own righteousness**. Fallen man uses religion, not to **find** God, but to **escape** the terms of God's salvation.

And Paul warns that if Jesus is left out, nothing else good can come out of the life. By good, Paul doesn't mean **morally** good. These people can do some good things. But there can be no **eternal good**. Our righteousness is still just filthy rags by God's standards. Only Jesus Christ can save the soul.