

Titus 1:10-16 Opponents of the Gospel

Verses 10-16 are very important. They tell us why Paul is writing to Titus. V. 5 He must “set in order” what is happening in vv. 10-16” Let me read them. (speak to v. 12 as to Cretan culture). I have 3 characteristics of those who oppose the gospel of Christ: 1) Words, 2) Motive, and 3) Works.

1. We know the opponents of the gospel because of their words. Look at vv. 10-11. **“For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced . . .”** Look back at 1:9. As Paul commands Titus to appoint elders in the churches, one of the qualifications is that he **“must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”** There were “many” in the church teaching something contrary to the gospel that Paul preached. Their words were contrary to the truth, contrary to “sound doctrine” (2:1). In this way, they were *“insubordinate,”* which basically means “rebellious,” or “not being subject to anyone.” They were also *“deceivers,”* leading people away with something that looked like the truth. In v. 11 we learn that they were *“upsetting whole families”* through their teaching. And they **“must be silenced.”**

So, who are these people and what are they teaching? It seems that a majority of them are Jews. For Paul says in v. 10: They are of the **“circumcision party.”** Then in v. 14 he says they are **“devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.”** Now, Paul is not anti-semitic. He himself is a Jew. So what are they teaching? Well, at the least they are teaching that a person needs to be “circumcised” in order to be saved. And apparently, they were also teaching what Paul calls “Jewish myths.”

Do you remember the Jerusalem Council from Acts 15? Let me tell the story. The preaching of the Gospel began in Jerusalem with the Jews. And it spread first with them as many Jews from other countries were in town for Pentecost, a Jewish religious holiday. And the Holy Spirit fell upon the Apostles and they began to speak in other languages the wonderful works of God in Christ. And these Jews heard these words, and many believed. And they went back to their homes and preached Christ and the resurrection to the Gentiles. And as time passed, more and more missionaries were sent to the Gentiles, particularly the Apostle Paul. And these Gentiles, did not follow the Law of Moses, nor were they circumcised as the Jews were under Abraham.

So, the early church gathered at a council in Jerusalem (Acts 15) to decide whether the Gentiles should be circumcised and follow Mosaic Law in order to be saved. And in the end, the council sent a letter with Paul and Barnabas saying, **“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well”** (Acts 15:28-29). In essence, I believe they are saying, *“You don’t have to keep the Law of Moses to be saved. You don’t have to follow the customs and traditions of the Jews in order to be saved.”* And, **“You don’t have to be circumcised”** (following Abrahamic Covenant). In other words, salvation does not come through the works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ! In Christ alone! As John says in 1:17: **“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through**

Jesus Christ.” So, these teachers were speaking words contrary to this truth. They were teaching Christ plus something else. This means their main error was works based righteousness, or thinking that I must DO SOMETHING in order to be saved. In this way their teaching opposed the Gospel that Paul preached, which is the true gospel.

For a good commentary on Titus, turn to Phil. 3:2-9: **“Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—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: 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; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. To Paul, these are the works of the Law of Moses, works that in the past he believed were the means to salvation. But notice what he says about these things he once counted as his salvation. In v. 7 **“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 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 . . .”** Now stop there for a moment. What did Paul discover? What did Paul find in Christ? And, why do I call their error “works based righteousness?” Because our righteousness falls short and will always fall short. Look at the middle of v. 8: **“in order that I may gain Christ 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—”** This the Gospel! And opponents of the gospel teach contrary to this gospel. We know them by their words!**

Application: Look at v. 11: **“They must be silenced.”** And then in v. 13: **“Rebuke them sharply,”** that they **“may be sound in the faith.”**

Application: There are many errors that can be taught as contrary to the gospel, but some form of works-based righteousness must be the greatest. John Owen says *“Works based righteousness is the enemy of all true religion.”* Salvation does not come to you because you go to church, give your money for good things, get baptized,

2. We know the opponents of the gospel because of their motives. Paul is not merely concerned with words, but also with motive, the heart, what is underneath our words and our actions. Look first at the 2nd part of v. 11: **“they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.”** Now, we are not sure if this “gain” was money or power or prestige or influence. But Paul does call this “gain” shameful, which can also be translated as “disgraceful.” Their motive is self . . . me, myself, and I, and what can I gain.

I think of a mercenary. During the Revolutionary War, England hired Germanic soldiers to join them in their war against the colonists. Why did they come and fight and risk their lives? Did they come because they believed in British Colonialism? No! They came because they were being paid. Their motive was financial gain. In the same kind of way, these opponents of the gospel were also in it for personal gain. But, at least a mercenary is honest and everyone knows why he fights. But, the false prophets are deceitful in their attempts to gain, using the Word of God to their advantage.

Listen to the words of Paul to Timothy as he confronts the same issue in Ephesus (Eph 1:3-5): **“As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.”** Then, he compares his motive to the motives of the false teachers. He continues in v. 5: **“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”**

So how do we begin to apply this truth in the local church? Well, the context of Titus is leadership and order in the church. Therefore, we must make sure we call godly elders that serve the body out of love and a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Peter gives a great description of what this looks like in the local church. **“So I exhort the elders among you . . . shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock”** (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Application: “When ministry is about gaining and expecting personal favors, gospel power dies” (Hughes). God does not need money and things to advance the gospel of Christ. Though messy, making disciples is still pretty simple. And the things we do here in the local church is still pretty simple. I do my best not to judge the hearts of people, but I believe many of our celebrity preachers fall into this category.

Application: Guard your hearts! Words and works follow the heart. Jesus says, **“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”** (Luke 6:45). It will always be the love of Christ that compels us to speak rightly and be godly. Therefore, make Christ your treasure. For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be.

3. We know the opponents of the gospel because of their works. Paul is concerned with purity of heart (Remember Eph. 1:5 above). He is merely following the teaching of Jesus who says, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”** (Matt. 5:8). But, often, it is difficult for us to know the heart. So how do we begin to make right judgments in the church and in this world concerning the opponents of the gospel? In vv. 15-16 Paul compares those who are pure in heart and those who are not. And the proof is found in their works. We know the opponents of the gospel because of their works. Look at verse 16: **“They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works . . .”** I will come back to false teachers briefly, but for a moment, let me try and apply this truth each of us.

Jesus says, **“You will know tree by its fruits”** (Luke 6:43). It is easy to distinguish between an apple tree and an orange tree. In the same kind of way, if we look at someone’s works over time, we can determine if their profession is true. For the Christian, what are the fruits that come from the heart? It is not difficult. Gal. 5:22 says, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control . . .”** Let me be clear. Over time, these qualities in the life a Christian come from the power of the Holy Spirit. This doesn’t mean we do not sin or that we see the opposite of these fruits in our lives. We are all at different places in our sanctification. The key is repentance and faith in Christ. When Christians sin, they repent. There is an inner motive of repentance. Consider the words of Jesus in Matt. 25 when he considers judgment day when he will separate the sheep from the goats. Jesus says to his sheep,

“Come to me, those who blessed by the Father . . . For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” Then, the righteous answer and say, **“Lord, when did we do these things? . . .”** And then, to the goats, the unrighteous, he says **“depart from me, for when I was hungry, you gave me no food, when I was thirsty you gave me no drink, when I was a stranger, you did not welcome me. When I was naked, you did not clothe me. When I was sick and in prison you did not visit me.”** And they say to him, **“Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did NOT minister to you?”** Do you see the difference? It is humility and repentance. This is what Christians do! We look at our lives and we beat our chests saying, *“I am a great sinner. Lord, have mercy upon me.”* So let me ask first, “how is it with you?”

Now, back to the false teachers. Let me read both verses 15 and 16 together: **“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.”** Here, Paul is very clear in distinguishing between true and false teachers. Those who teach the truth he describes as “pure.” Those who do not teach the truth he describes as “defiled” and “unbelieving.” So what is the difference in plain words.

He is saying, *“Do not think any works of the flesh will make you clean, pure, righteous before God.”* In the end, this is what the false teachers were thinking and teaching. *“Eat this. Don’t eat that. Drink this. Don’t drink that. Clean that cup, but not that one. Don’t touch this or that. Wash yourself in a particular way.”* This is works-based righteousness. And only Christ can make us pure. Only Christ can fulfill all the commands in Mosaic law. This is why Jesus and his disciples don’t wash themselves in the particular ways found in Leviticus. This is why Jesus hung out with tax collectors and prostitutes and touched lepers. This is why Jesus told Nicodemus, *“you must be born again, born from above.”* He says to him, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”** (John 3-5-6). In speaking of “water” he is picturing the cleansing from God.

All the examples of physical cleaning found in the Law of Moses are fulfilled in Christ. Christ came to make us clean! He says to the Pharisees, *“The outside of the cup may look good; (these are all the works of the law of Moses.) But, if the inside of the cup is not cleansed, what good is it.”* Christ came to clean the inside of the cup, the heart, which is a picture of the whole person. This is why he says, **“to the pure, all things are pure.”** Because of the person and work of Christ, Christians are clean. We are pure in heart! We shall see God! Why? Because Christ has broken down the law of sin which separates us from God. In his person, He is the holy Son of God. God took on flesh. He was born and lived a sinless life, a pure life. And he laid down his life on the cross as a pure sacrifice. Brothers and sisters, we are not pure! He is! And God accepted his sacrifice as pure and acceptable. He took our sin upon himself. God’s wrath and anger fell on him. And for those who believe, those who have faith in Christ, are clean, “pure in heart.” And “to the pure all things are pure” means that we can eat, we can drink, we can live in freedom. **“Whether you eat or drink, do all to the glory of God.” “If the son has set you free,**

you are free indeed.” it is not so with the opponents of the gospel. Look back at v. 15. They are “defiled” (not clean), “unbelieving” and not “pure.”

In the end, the works of false teachers, the works of the opponents of the gospel, even if some of them are good on the outside, are not pure because they are not covered by the blood of Christ. In the Scriptures there is always an emphasis on “doing” and “being.” Of course we do good works! But, these works flow from who we are. We are united with Christ by the Spirit. We are alive. We are free! We are pure!

One final application: These truths serve as a test for us . . . our words, your motives, our works. Consider Paul’s words to the Corinthians, **“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?— unless you fail to meet the test . . .”**