

It was a routine visit for the pastor. New people had visited his church and filled out a registration card with their phone number. He called and offered his services to visit with them and answer any questions they might have. Their answer was an enthusiastic “yes!” so one evening (later-on) that week... he came by. Composing this family of 5 was the husband (who was a firefighter)... his wife (an employee of the department of motor vehicles)... and their three daughters (the oldest two were twins... and were in the 4th grade.)

It was a pleasant visit and about half-way through... the wife asked the pastor a question that made his heart soar with delight. She apologized for not knowing the right words to use... but this woman (who worked at the DMV) did her best by using an analogy. She told the pastor that she enjoyed her visit to the church, “*but,*” she said with an earnest (and very puzzled expression) “*everyone seemed to be driving in a different lane than us. The whole time we were there everyone was over there... and we were here. Can you please tell me how we can get into the same lane that everyone else in your church is in? They seemed so joyful.”*

That evening the pastor led the family to the Lord. They gave their hearts to Christ (as Christ-followers) and their lives immediately merged into the lane that is Heaven-bound. They became regular attenders and then members of the church.

Everything was fine for a several weeks... and then the pastor received a phone call from this family. Something had shaken their new-found faith in Christ. Their *faith-crisis* had been needlessly caused... by what the twin daughters had experienced in their Sunday School class.

The 4th grade girl's Sunday school teacher was Tammy. She had been part of the church for many years. She and her husband were influential members... They were involved in AWANA... taught Sunday School... rotated in as nursery attendants... and were definitely at the center of all the fun activities ... (hosting parties and gatherings at their home.) They were popular and very connected to everyone in the church.

Apparently Tammy had abandoned the Sunday School curriculum that the superintendent had been providing to her. (She didn't think that she needed to let the Sunday School superintendent or any of the pastors know... but she decided to go off on her own. ... Tammy ad-libbed her Bible lessons.

On the Sunday morning that made the new Christian family want to quit the church... Tammy led the twin daughters to believe that their parents were certainly on the highway going to Hell... because they were not part of the right political party. Tammy had told them that you cannot be a Christian and belong to one of the two major political parties in our country. Knowing that their parents WERE members of that political party – the twins were devastated.

Now... I don't really care what YOUR position is... on this question of whether or not you can affiliate yourself with a certain political party and still be a Christian. I would probably agree with you that one seems to be MORE - in lock-step with demonic purposes – but POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION does not define a person's salvation. ... To focus on it takes our eye off the ball of what's REALLY important. (You see) our efforts in the church MUST BE focused on getting people better connected to Christ. Then... let the Holy Spirit do His work in people's lives on these much lesser matters... like political party affiliation. ... (It's a distraction.)

The pastor faced a dilemma. He needed to confront the false (and divergent) teaching for the sake of this family of new believers. (Their faith was now shaking.) Further harm would come to them... if he did nothing. And such falsehood could damage others... if it was allowed. He certainly did not want to pastor a church... where only a certain political party was welcome. ... But (on-the-other-hand) he knew that if he **did** confront someone like Tammy... any semblance of peace in the church would quickly turn to turmoil. This was a powder-keg of T-N-T !

Well... I **did** confront... and turmoil **did** erupt. (You knew that **I** was that pastor – all along – didn't you?) Being in ministry is always challenging. Standing for the truth is not a popular pastime. ... Defending the truth is for neither the fainthearted nor those who want to be liked above all else. That's because the realm of truth is not a playground; it's a battleground.

One of the things that has helped me (through the years) is the honest writing of men like Chuck Swindoll... who give me fresh perspective on all the romantic idealism of ministry... with such comments like **this** (which I found... as I studied for today's passage.)

After more than five decades in pastoral ministry, you'd think that I would have outgrown my youthful idealism. Certainly by now, I should have left behind my silly notion that if I worked hard enough, preached strong enough, prayed long enough, and invested myself enough in the lives of people that my church would eventually struggle free of depravity's clutches and create something close to paradise on earth. Certainly by now, I should have realized that the success I long for doesn't just lie beyond whatever crisis I happen to be facing at the time.

Why should I be so stunned? Why should discouragement nearly always take me to the brink of quitting, after all these years? ... When

will I lose this often-painful idealism? Never, I hope. If I ever do, *then*, it will be time to call it quits.

Satan is the master of deception. To afflict the church... he artfully drapes his lies in the regal robes of truth. He seduces charming... intelligent men and women... *promising the world* - in exchange for their help in deceiving others. ... He brings his false teachers into the church. And how convincing they are! Keeping their true nature carefully concealed — they deftly move among God’s elect... up through the ranks of authority and into positions of power. Lacking truth... they win friends and influence people by means of a contrived charisma that’s difficult to resist... even for those who despise falsehood.

Nevertheless... a trained eye can spot them. Paul’s letter to Titus (in our passage today) explains how. ... He instructed his younger colleague to watch for three clues... (wrong words... wrong motives... and wrong actions.) ... We will see that they are REBELLIOUS people... EMPTY TALKERS... and DECEITFUL people.

No church is immune to them. Let’s learn to recognize the signs of heresy-spreaders... and give due diligence for NOT letting them get a foothold in our midst.

Titus 1:10

The word translated “*insubordinate*” means “*unaccountable*.” Heresy-spreaders refuse to submit themselves to proper church authority. “*I will do whatever I want... I don’t need authorization or anyone’s approval. I am my own authority...*” They establish themselves as ALL THE AUTHORITY

THEY NEED. (Tammy thought that it was perfectly legitimate to lay aside her church-provided curriculum... do her own thing... and not tell anyone.)

Throughout my years of ministry... I sometimes see a rather audacious disrespect for the proper Biblical authority structure in a church. (“*No one is going to tell me what to do...*”) ... It often comes from a respected church member who has won friends in the church and influenced fellow members by means of a contrived charisma. They are difficult to resist... because they have made you feel that they would do anything for you (they always seem willing and able to help you – whenever you have a need.) They intentionally cultivate a sense of loyalty from you to themselves.

It is true! They often seem like very caring and helpful brothers and sisters in Christ to you and to others. BUT THEY ARE INSUBORDINATE (unaccountable to proper authority. They are their own authority.) Our passage is telling us to watch out for folks like that. It doesn’t matter how helpful they have been to you. If they show signs of insubordination – don’t let them have you in their back pocket.

It is HARD... but Scripture issues a stern warning here. Satan is very crafty in how he plants his workers of iniquity in a church. Look beyond their helpfulness. Do they show signs of insubordination?

Verse ten mentions another marker of someone who is a deceiver in our midst. Maybe you don’t sense insubordination. Perhaps... though... you do see this one. This might (also) be a warning. Heresy-spreaders sometimes will show themselves by being “empty talkers.”

“Empty talkers” speak with smooth... captivating... even persuasive conviction... but have little or nothing on which to base their teaching. You

won't hear clear Bible references (that when you look them up... they actually address what the person is saying). They cleverly present their personal opinions as spiritual truth... but have no real/substantive Biblical backing. They can impress people with the strength of their conviction – but when you boil it all down – it is only “hot air”! (With conviction... Tammy presented her personal opinion... as spiritual truth... to her 4th grade Sunday School class.)

A third indicator (here in verse ten) is deception. The wording that Paul used is actually “*mind deceivers*.” Scholars think that Paul coined this term. It isn't found anywhere else in Greek literature. It is thought that Paul wanted to describe the false teachers as persons who deliberately engage in mind-bending control.

Do you know what that sounds an awful lot like? It sounds like the mind-bending tricks that the cults (back in the 70's and 80's) were doing here in the United States. Some still do this. They play heavy mind games with their devotees and maneuver them to do things they would otherwise not do. (Charles Manson comes to mind.) Much of their mind-control is by inciting fear that if they were to leave the cult – or hold a dissenting opinion of its teaching – they would face sure and devastating consequences.

But even inside the church a certain amount of the mind-deception can happen. “Imitate our behaviors... eat only certain foods... don't engage in certain activities... or you will not go to Heaven...” Paul singled-out this particular kind of mind-deception for Titus... when he wrote “especially those of the circumcision party” – at the end of verse ten.

In the situation at Crete... the peddlers of “theological heresy” were Judaizers (who offered a *Jesus plus* salvation... which is always a *minus* *Jesus* theology.) Add to Christ... and you subtract Christ. (This is spiritual mathematics.) ... Like a fast-spreading cancer... these masters of deception did not infect one - but many (entire households.)

They propagated a “*man-centered message*” ... (a “what-I-can-do gospel”)... which deflects our focus from Christ and His cross... to ourselves and our accomplishments. ... (Like what Tammy had done... it confused the simple message of the Gospel.)

This wrongful idea that we have to add something to faith to make it genuine... (or to make ourselves worthy)... results in arrogance... hardness... and envy. ... There is often a competition to exceed the goodness of others. (“*I am more worthy of salvation than YOU...*”) Some who live the gospel-plus doctrine... discover the need to tear down others in order to build themselves up. Gossip... backbiting... and power plays result. There is a need to cover and minimize our own sin... lest we fail to meet others’ expectations. ... Any kind of belief that God loves us because we are better than others in knowledge... practice... or lineage creates intolerance... bitterness... dissension... and despair.

So... (you see)... entire house-holds were being ruined.

But it wasn’t just in Paul’s day. “Gospel-plus” attitudes exist in every church or Christian organization of our own day. You might be listening to me right now... and believe that because you do not measure up (in some dimension)... that you are not as valuable to God... as someone else... or as valuable as you could be. ... Gospel-plus thinking is sidelining Christians

with despair. (LISTEN!) The gospel of Grace means that you can never earn more favor with God.

Titus 1:11

We can more readily see the signs of a false teacher that are given to us in verse 10... but what we are given in verse 11 is more difficult. We need to pay attention to those who are insubordinate to proper Biblical authority that God places in each church... and those who speak their opinions as though they are spiritual truth (without any substantive support – like proper scripture citations)... and to those who are mind-benders to hold others tight to their false gospel of earning God’s favor. ... We can observe these... but verse 11 gives us their motive... which is not as easy to spot.

We can’t truly know someone’s motives. But if we see the more observable signs of verse 10... we can know this – these false teachers do what they do for some kind of shameful reward. It might be money... or power... or fame.

Please be careful about your motive for doing ministry. I say that because we are about to see in verse 14 that the heresy-spreaders (that Paul wanted Titus to silence) had turned away from the faith. They had once been Biblical... but a motive for shameful gain enticed them away. ... Are you after any kind of earthly reward? ... [P A U S E] ...

Verse 11 says (clearly) “*They must be silenced.*” ... Two verses later in verse 13... he adds “*rebuke them SHARPLY...*” There is to be NO tolerance. ... There is too much tolerance in the church today – which is why it is so weak! Every attempt to follow Paul’s instructions in this

passage... are met with mass exodus' from churches today. Church leaders know this... and fear to confront in a Biblical manner.

Paul advised flatly that they “*must be silenced*” and “*rebuke them sharply.*” This sounds very harsh... especially in our era of wholesale religious acceptance. ... “Confront false teachers without delay... or they will tear the churches apart.”

Titus 1:12-13

To emphasize his point Paul quoted from Epimenides (a Cretan poet and philosopher who had lived in Crete 600 years earlier.) He was widely believed to be a religious prophet. Paul called him a prophet because other ancient writers (notably Aristotle and Cicero) did so. (Paul was not saying he was a prophet in the biblical sense. He is simply a philosopher or wise man to the Greek culture.)

Epimenides gave a strong indictment concerning his own people... (Cretans)... saying that they were full of lies and were ferocious in character. ... To deceive and lie became known as “*playing the Cretan.*” The lying characteristic of Cretans was so notorious... that it was the subject of frequent remarks in ancient literature.

But Paul’s charge (here) was not against all Cretans. Because it was an accepted general description (an actual proverb) of how the population behaved ... Paul used it to describe the false teachers. “They actually **FIT** this proverb!” ... The false teachers are using the natural habits of the people of this island... to obtain shameful gain for themselves. They feed off of their own church brethren... who are gullible (as new believers.)

I think that Paul was also doing two other things by citing Epimenides. #1. He gave a subtle reminder to the Cretan believers that they had inherited a new nature in Christ (when He saved them.) They now have a new nature and identity. ... But the false teachers had rejected it.

#2. (I believe that) Paul was injecting a little wry humor. (Think about it!) If “**all** Cretans are liars,” then the Cretan who wrote the statement is also lying. ... This sweeping condemnation of all Cretans... is itself a lie. So... rather than giving a harsh assessment of all Cretans... Paul is being humorously ironic. ... [P A U S E] ...

Now... lets return to the last phrase of verse 13...

Titus 1:13b

Who is Paul showing a concern for...? Stop and consider how gracious this is. ... Those who are involved in empty talk... deception... selfish gain... and lies should be rebuked... “*so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth.*”

Paul is concerned even for those who oppose him... and whose words are ruining others. ... Those who are enemies of the gospel... are included under the umbrella of Paul’s concern. ... This is a marked contrast between the world’s attitudes... and the attitudes of true believers. ... Just as “when we were God’s enemies... we were reconciled to Him through the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10)... so we should be willing to look past personal hurt and pain... in order to seek the progress of the gospel - even among those whose actions oppose us.

While our rebuke must be prompt... and forthright... it will undoubtedly feel harsh to the false teacher (and their loyal church friends)... but it is NEVER to irreparably insult and humiliate them. Paul did not call for Titus to crush his enemies of truth with a withering verbal assault – but to ***redeem*** them!

As a surgeon cuts away diseased and infectious tissue that threatens the health of the body... we must cut away toxic teaching... from the church. ... What is our goal in performing this spiritual surgery? ... It is redemptive. ... It is so that those who are self-deceived (and deceiving others) may be “*sound in the faith.*” ... We cut to cure. ... We confront... but we confront in love. ... We love them enough to point out their error and with the hope of their recovery to spiritual health and vitality.

False teachers HAVE to be dealt with. There is no choice. Confronting them with the truth of Christ and of the Word... is their only hope. (LISTEN!) It is necessary to appear rude sometimes for safety... if the house is on fire... and a life is in danger.

Titus 1:14

Now we get a clearer picture of what the false teachers were doing at Crete. Paul’s comments suggest that two kinds of false teaching challenged the churches on Crete: Jewish mythology... and rigorous abstinence (obeying religious laws...).

By the time of Jesus... Jewish literature overflowed with fables about angels and demons (how they procreated and interacted with people... and how their activities affected history.) ... False teachings based on a blend of Greek philosophy with Jewish mythology thrived and reproduced like weeds during the first three centuries after Christ. ... Unfortunately... these

sensational stories diverted attention away from the truth (as revealed by Jesus Christ and taught by the people who were trained by Him.) Crete's people had a preoccupation with Greek and Jewish mixed-legends. The congregations needed to get back to basics.

Our next verse (here) in chapter one... has given a lot of justification to wanderers (down through the centuries) as they wandered **AWAY** from the basics. ... Verse 15 has been contorted and twisted in order to fit a lot of BAD theology and behavior.

Titus 1:15

Titus 1:15 is one of those verses that some ill-informed people try to use to defend their ungodly practices. "*To the pure, all things are pure*" is used to excuse all sorts of sin. There are those who say that this means – "*if you think something is not sin... then to you... it is not sin.*"

But is this a verse that justifies relativism "different strokes for different folks"...? ... What (in the world) does Paul mean...? Why would he say such a thing...?

These statements must be placed in the context of who Paul has been condemning in the passage - those in "the circumcision group." We know that this group claimed that a person's relationship with God is based upon the observance of certain ceremonial codes and cleanliness practices. According to them... you are made pure by your outward conduct in observing Jewish Law.

But Paul contrasts the belief of this false teaching with Jesus' teaching that purification is a matter of the internal – not external rituals. ... "Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him.... What comes

out of a man makes him 'unclean' " (Mk 7:15, 20). Paul summarizes this (here) in verse 15: *To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who ... do not believe, nothing is pure.* ... Purity that counts comes only through faith in Christ. ... Nothing outside can corrupt one who is internally pure (because of Christ.) But someone who is internally impure (in their minds and consciences) corrupts all he touches. ... [P A U S E] ...

Titus 1:16

Paul returns to a central theme of the letter. ... Genuine belief in the truth of God produces a lifestyle of godly behavior. ... This is a definite mark of a false teacher. When you look closely... you will notice an absence of godly behavior. (Sometimes you don't have to look all that close. But since they have done several favors for you... (winning your loyalty to them) ... you get blinded to their godless behaviors that ARE there.) ... But the absence of good deeds is good cause for suspicion. ... False teachers merely profess to understand spiritual truths but are (in fact) incapable of godly behavior... because they do not possess the truth they claim.

Neither blindness through a sense of loyalty... or fear of church turmoil... should ever prevent us from trying to correct and restore an erring person to spiritual health. This health comes only from acceptance of *the faith*. Turned around, as they were, these lying and perverse heretics could still be brought to repentance through confrontation with the true faith.

The ministry of confrontation is not easy... but it is essential. When the integrity of the gospel is at stake... we cannot run and hide. We must stand ... armed with truth... motivated by love... and clothed with a pure life... we must engage the enemy and rescue the captive.

Imagine picking your car up from the shop after a routine tune-up, and the technician says, "*This car is in great shape. Clearly you have an automotive genius to take great care of your car.*" Later that day, your brakes don't work. You find out you were out of brake fluid. You could have died.

You go back to the shop, and you say, "*Why didn't you tell me?*" The technician replies, "*Well, I didn't want you to feel bad. Plus, to be honest, I was afraid you might get upset with me. I want this to be a safe place where you feel loved and accepted.*" You'd be furious! You'd say, "*I didn't come here for a little fantasy-based ego boost! When it comes to my car, I want the truth.*"

Or imagine going to the doctor's office for a check-up. The doctor says to you, "*You are a magnificent physical specimen. You have the body of an Olympian. You are to be congratulated.*" Later that day while climbing the stairs, your heart gives out. You find out later your arteries were so clogged that you were, like, one jelly doughnut away from the grim reaper.

You go back to the doctor and say, "*Why didn't you tell me?*" The doctor says, "*Well, I knew your body is in worse shape than the Pillsbury doughboy, but if I tell people stuff like that, they get offended. It's bad for business. They don't come back. I want this to be a safe place where you feel loved and accepted.*" You'd be furious! You'd say to the doctor, "*When it comes to my body, I want the truth!*"

Obviously, when something matters to us, we do not want illusory comfort based on pain avoidance. Church(!) Let's not be afraid of telling the truth!