
Restored Leadership Part 2

March 18, 2018 - Titus 1:10-16

10 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.

1:10–16 How to deal with the false teachers

Again there are a few differences between this section and the passages in 1 and 2 Timothy dealing with the false teachers. There is here a clearer stress on the Jewishness of the teaching. The circumcision group and also Jewish myths are mentioned (14). Nevertheless, the most evident characteristics of the false teachers are the emptiness of their talk, the tendency to deceive, the ruinous results and the money motive (10–11). The position in Crete was aggravated by the character of the people, expressed in v 12 by one of their own poets, who is generally identified as Epimenides, a sixth-century bc philosopher.

In view of the difficult character of these people, Paul advises strong action. *They must be silenced* (11); they are to be rebuked *sharply* (13); and Titus is *to pay no attention* to them (14). Paul does not believe they are worth arguing with, but Titus should concentrate on rebuking them in order that they may become *sound in the faith*. This is a positive approach which is still of great value when dealing with those who deviate from the truth. V 15 furnishes a further comment to assist Titus, for those of corrupt minds will not recognize purity. Once the mind is corrupted the conscience swiftly follows suit. Paul realizes that false teachers are subtle in that they give every appearance of being religious (*they claim to know God*), but their actions give the lie to this (16). It may be thought that Paul speaks in a particularly derogatory way of them in the second part of v 16, but this shows his horror of

those who lead others astray. The importance of a right understanding of Christian doctrine could not be more strongly stated.¹

1:10-16

Evil Legalists

Although the opponents here are probably related to opponents Paul had faced elsewhere, they may have derived some of their appeal from local knowledge of Judaism and possibly a strong Jewish element within the church. Crete was racially mixed, and a large Jewish colony was there.

1:10. “Empty talk” (NASB) characterized many pseudointellectuals in antiquity; see comment on 1 Timothy 1:6 and 2 Timothy 2:14.

1:11. “Upsetting whole families” (NASB) could mean that, by gaining entrance to families, these false teachers were disrupting whole households (cf. 2 Tim 3:6-7), but more likely Paul means that they are “subverting” (KJV) households. Perhaps they are undermining the authority structures current in the culture (Tit 2:4-5, 9-10); less likely, they may oppose marriage or sex within marriage on ascetic grounds (see comment on 1 Tim 4:1-3; 1 Cor 7:1-7). Neither error was characteristic of Palestinian or Diaspora Judaism, although many Essenes advocated celibacy.

On those who taught for “gain,” see comment on 1 Timothy 6:3-10; this accusation was commonly leveled against traveling teachers of morality, probably including Paul (1 Thess 2:5). A writer long before Paul charged that the Cretans were known to be more fond of gain, dishonest as well as honest, than any other people.

1:12. The saying Paul quotes here has been attributed to several sources, the earliest being the sixth-century b.c. teacher Epimenides of Knossos in Crete. (The real source may more likely be Hesiod by way of the third-century b.c. Callimachus’s *Hymn to Zeus*; Crete claimed to possess both the birthplace and grave of Zeus. But that the words were often attributed to a Cretan in Paul’s day is sufficient for him to make the point for Titus. Paul is clearly not citing his own view, because he would not consider a liar to be a true prophet. Greek logicians played with the claim by a Cretan that all Cretans were liars: if he had told the truth, he was lying; but if he was lying, then they reasoned that all Cretans told the truth—reasonable, except that this Cretan had not!)

By Paul’s time Epimenides was reputed to have been a traveling wonderworker, teacher and prophet; as usual in Greek thought, the line between poetic and prophetic inspiration could be thin. Although the saying seems to have become proverbial (one commentator

¹ Guthrie, D. (1994). Titus. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1312). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

declares that “to cretize” became slang for “to lie”), it is possible that Paul knew either the works of Epimenides or, perhaps more likely, an anthology containing sayings attributed to him (see comment on Acts 17:27–29).

Crete also had a bad reputation for arrogance, treachery and greed. “Gluttony” was associated with love of pleasure as opposed to love of knowledge; see comment on Philippians 3:19.

1:13. Ancient ethnographers attributed certain characteristics (both good and bad) to various peoples whose cultures emphasized those traits. (That Paul could cite these negative characteristics of Cretans in a letter that Cretan believers would hear suggests that he must have been on very good terms with them and that Cretans recognized these characteristics of their own culture; he is not offering here a model for crosscultural sensitivity in normal situations.)

1:14. Jewish “myths” would especially be *haggadot*, stories amplifying or explaining biblical narratives. Pharisees and others who tried to expound and apply biblical law for their own times were forced to surround it with case law, detailing how the Old Testament rules addressed specific situations; Paul apparently dismisses such legal traditions here.

1:15. The Old Testament law considered some foods pure and other foods impure (cf. 1:14), but Paul applies the common figurative extension of purity language to moral and spiritual purity (see 1 Tim 4:3–5; cf. Rom 14:14).

1:16. In the Old Testament, “knowing God” was being in covenant relationship with him; on a personal level, this meant an intimate relationship of faithfulness to him. But the claim was worthless if not accompanied by just treatment of others and obedience to the Scriptures (Hos 8:2–3; Jer 22:16).²

One of Titus’s major responsibilities in overseeing the churches on Crete was to prepare them to counteract the false teaching and immoral living of certain leaders. Paul charged Titus, and through him the churches, not simply to correct their false doctrine and denounce their immoral behavior but to silence them and remove such spiritual cancers from the fellowships.

These false teachers were much like those in Ephesus about whom Paul had warned Timothy. The young elder was admonished to “instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith,” men who had “turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make

² Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Tt 1:10–16). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

confident assertions” (1 Tim. 1:3–4, 6–7). Obviously, the apostle believed that those particular men may have been salvageable, perhaps even as teachers.

Some of the false teachers in Crete, however, were beyond reclamation, because, as Paul asserts at the end of the present passage, “They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed” (Titus 1:16).

In general, the tongue is a devastating force for evil, and in the mouths of false teachers who need to be silenced, it has always been a severe danger, not only to God’s people but also to society in general. “The tongue is a small part of the body,” James reminds us, “and yet it boasts of great things. Behold, how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell” (James 3:5–6). Left unchecked, the tongue spews forth the filth and evil of a depraved heart and mind and can cause immeasurable damage. Nothing better demonstrates man’s fallenness and depravity than the wicked things that come out of his mouth. “With their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips,” Paul says of those who speak evil; their mouths are “full of cursing and bitterness” (Rom. 3:13–14; cf. Pss. 5:9; 140:3). Isaiah referred to his sinfulness as “unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). God promises that one day “the mouths of those who speak lies will be stopped” (Ps. 63:11; cf. 107:42; Rom. 3:19).

Sometimes God sovereignly silences a person’s tongue by sickness or death. Sometimes He chooses to close a blasphemous mouth by other means. Countless times He has silenced a wicked tongue by graciously bringing its owner to Himself in salvation. Sometimes He says to His own people what He said to Ezekiel, one of His choice servants: “I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth so that you will be dumb, ... But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth” (Ezek. 3:26–27). The day will come when God will intervene and forever silence all false preachers and teachers.

In the meanwhile, however, it is the task of the church, and especially of its godly leaders, to silence those who associate with the Body of Christ in an effort to pervert God’s truth and confuse and corrupt His people. “Evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived,” Paul assured Timothy (2 Tim. 3:13). But, like Timothy, faithful pastors and elders have standing orders to “guard what has been entrusted to [them], avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’ ” (1 Tim. 6:20).

First, 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.

Jesus combated the lies and deceptions of Satan and of his ungodly human servants by declaring divine truth. He thwarted Satan in the wilderness by countering each temptation with a quotation from Scripture (Matt. 4:1–11). When the unbelieving Sadducees tried to confound Jesus by asking Him what they thought was an unanswerable question about marriage in heaven, He “answered and said to them, ‘You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven’ ” (Matt. 22:29–30). Simply by stating the truth, “He had put the Sadducees to silence” (v. 34).

Thinking they could succeed where the Sadducees had failed, the Pharisees had one of their scribes, “a lawyer, [ask] Him a question, testing Him, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ ” (Matt. 22:35–36). He replied that the greatest commandment was to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and that “a second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (vv. 37, 39). He then turned the tables and questioned them about the relationship of the Messiah to King David. When He pointed out from Scripture that their answer was defective, “no one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question” (v. 46).

False teachers are not, of course, always silenced by God’s truth, certainly not permanently. After the occasion just mentioned, the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and other enemies of Jesus stopped confronting Him directly, but they hardly stopped opposing Him. Nor will false teachers today always or permanently be silenced when confronted by God’s truth. Yet that truth will always be the primary weapon for combating error. Truth is the spiritual weapon that is able to destroy fortresses and speculations (false ideologies) and “every lofty thing” that is raised up against the truth of God (see 2 Cor. 10:4–5).

Second, we are to oppose false teachers by revoking their right to preach, teach, or otherwise have leadership in the church. In modern times, that revocation includes refusing to support or encourage spurious teaching that they promulgate through magazines, books, radio, television, tape ministries, conferences, teaching positions, or any other means.

Third, false teachers are to be opposed by believers living holy lives. Error promotes sin, and people who teach ungodly ideas inevitably live ungodly lives. God’s truth also is impugned when those who teach that truth do not live accordingly. On the other hand, righteous living undergirds the truth, and it “is the will of God that by doing right [we] may silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Pet. 2:15).

In Titus 1:10–16, Paul first gives a general description of false teachers in the church who are to be silenced (vv. 10–13a). He then specifies what the reaction to such men should be (vv. 13b–14) and evaluates their lives (vv. 15–16).

The Description of the Men Who Must be Silenced

For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. (1:10–13a)

In describing the false teachers who were to be restrained and removed from the churches, the apostle points out their proliferation (v. 10a), their behavior, which included rebelliousness, empty talk, and deceit (v. 10b), their effect on believers in the churches (v. 11a), their motive (v. 11b), and their character, which was lying, savage, and gluttonous (vv. 12–13a).

their proliferation

For there are many (1:10a)

The fact that **there [were] many** false teachers in the churches of Crete made Titus's responsibility to oppose them all the more urgent. It was also for that reason, among others, that he needed to carefully “appoint elders in every city,” as Paul already had directed (v. 5). No matter how diligent and persuasive Titus might have been, no one man would have had time to deal with the growing number of heretics and apostates. Most believers in those churches were new in the faith and had little defense against erroneous doctrine.

Paul had given similar warning to Timothy, saying that “the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (1 Tim. 4:1–2). The “later times” about which the Spirit spoke had already begun.

Perhaps a year after Paul wrote to Titus, Peter warned churches throughout the empire that “there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words” (2 Pet. 2:1–3).

The greatest spiritual danger always comes from within the church. “Now I urge you, brethren,” Paul counseled the church at Rome, “keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting” (Rom.

16:17–18). Paul warned the Ephesian elders: “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29–30).

By definition, dissension comes from within a group. In the church, deceivers disguise themselves as believers and as true teachers of the gospel. At all costs and by every godly means, they are to be silenced. The danger of false gospels is so great that Paul said that even if he “or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8).

their behavior

rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, (1:10b)

First of all, the false teachers on Crete were **rebellious**, as such people always are. They are spiritual and moral insurgents—the enemies of God, His truth, and His people. Being a law unto themselves and representing the rebel Satan, they do not recognize the authority of God’s Word or of His Spirit, much less that of His divinely called preachers and teachers. Even when their erroneous doctrine and immoral living are exposed, they are inclined to defy correction and discipline by the true church.

Second, the false teachers were **empty talkers**. In the words of Shakespeare, they are “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” 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.

Third, those false teachers were **deceivers**. As already noted, they typically disguise their deceit in biblical terminology. And unfortunately, they seldom lack for an audience. Almost from its beginning, the church has included some people who, buying into that deception, “will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, ... will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:3–4; cf. 1 Tim. 4:1–2).

God hates all lying and deceit. “ ‘Let none of you devise evil in your heart against another, and do not love perjury; for all these are what I hate,’ declares the Lord” (Zech. 8:17; cf. Mal. 3:5). But He holds special hatred for lying and deceit that is done in His name, most specially when it is directed at His people.

As Paul was the peerless apostle against false teaching, so Jeremiah was the peerless Old Testament prophet against it. He declared:

Then the Lord said to me, “The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds.” ... Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: “You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds.... I did not send these prophets, but they ran. I did not speak to them, but they prophesied.... Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,” declares the Lord, “and related them, and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting.” (Jer. 14:14; 23:2, 21, 32)

Prophesying falsehood in the name of a false god is evil enough, but false prophesying in the name of the true God is immeasurably worse. “Moreover, among the prophets of Samaria I saw an *offensive* thing: They prophesied by Baal and led My people Israel astray. Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a *horrible* thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah” (Jer. 23:13–14, emphasis added). The falsehoods of the pagan prophets in Samaria were *offensive*, but those of the pretended prophets of the Lord in Jerusalem were *horrible*.

Because so many of the early Christians were Jews, churches in New Testament times were **especially** plagued by **those of the circumcision**, that is, by Jews within the church. Some of them, called Judaizers because of their attempt to obligate all believers to Jewish legalism, wanted to impose Old Testament ceremonial standards and sometimes even rabbinical traditions. From ancient records it is known that many Jews lived on the island of Crete (cf. Acts 2:11), and from the apostle’s comments here, a number of them apparently were Judaizers.

Some fifteen years earlier, the Council of Jerusalem was convened to respond to “certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who [said], ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses’ ” (Acts 15:5). As first spokesman for the council, Peter asked, “Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” (v. 10). After considerable discussion by the group and reports by Paul and Barnabas about the “signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles,” James proposed that they “not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but ... write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood” (see vv. 12–20). The rest of the council agreed, and letters to that effect

were sent “to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia” (vv. 22–23), where the problem at that time was the most serious.

That the influence of Judaizers in the church continued to be powerful for many years after that, however, is seen in Peter’s own temporarily distancing himself from Gentile believers because of his “fearing the party of the circumcision” (Gal. 2:12), a compromise for which Paul “opposed him to his face” (v. 11).

As Paul notes later in this chapter, the men **of the circumcision** in the Cretan churches were spreading “Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth” (v. 14). And, although they “[professed] to know God, ... by their deeds they [denied] Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed” (v. 16). The apostle does not describe the exact form of this heresy, and the particulars are not important. All false teaching must be opposed, in whatever way and to whatever degree it departs from Scripture.

their effect

who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, (1:11a)

These particular heretics apparently were not doing most of their teaching during worship services or other church meetings but in the homes of the people. Several reasons for such a tactic are obvious. For one thing, a large group is more likely to include believers who are spiritually perceptive and well grounded in Scripture, making false teaching more likely to be recognized and contested. An isolated small group such as a single family, on the other hand, not 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. Speaking of just such activity, Peter wrote that, “speaking out arrogant words of vanity,” false teachers “entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error” (2 Pet. 2:18).

Deceivers in the church **must be silenced**, Paul said, **because they are upsetting whole families**. Paul warned Timothy about ungodly and immoral men “who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses” (2 Tim. 3:6). Earlier in that letter he had admonished the young pastor at Ephesus to charge believers there “not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers,” and to “avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness” (2 Tim. 2:14, 16). Peter tells us that “untaught and unstable” leaders in the early church distorted the teachings of Paul, “as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2 Pet. 3:16).

their motive

for the sake of sordid gain. (1:11b)

With perhaps a few fanatical exceptions, false teachers carry on their destructive work **for the sake of sordid gain.**

Sordid gain refers primarily to ill-gotten financial profit. The motives and objectives of ungodly leaders are in direct contrast to those who are godly. Whereas godly elders are morally pure and faithful to their wives (v. 6), ungodly leaders are immoral and unfaithful. The sinful attributes of self-will, a quick temper, addiction to wine, belligerence, and loving money that should *not* be found in elders (v. 7) are the very things that ungodly men cherish. On the other hand, the righteous attitudes of self-control, hospitality, and loving what is good, sensible, just, and devout that *are* found in godly elders (v. 8) are things that ungodly leaders repudiate and despise. The faithful word of sound doctrine that godly elders teach and defend is what the ungodly seek to destroy. And it is a distinct mark of false teachers that they love money.

Throughout the history of the church, false preachers and teachers have used their positions and slanted their messages to promote their own financial **gain**. They not only have “a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,” but they also “suppose that godliness is a means of gain” (1 Tim. 6:4–5). “Godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment,” Paul goes on to say (v. 6), but that is not the kind of **gain** that false teachers crave. Peter warns all pastors to “shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain” (1 Pet. 5:2).

their character

One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. (1:12–13a)

The immorality, greed, and untrustworthiness of the false teachers about whom Paul warns were characteristic of the island’s inhabitants in general, as testified by **one of themselves, a prophet of their own**. Although that **prophet**, the poet Epimenides, may have been exaggerating, his basic assessment was on target. He 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. As a native of Crete, he knew the people well and was not speaking out of malice as an enemy.

The Cretans’ most famous falsehood, doubtless also a self-deception, was the claim that the god Zeus was buried on their island. Even in light of their own pagan belief, that claim

was foolish, because Zeus was considered to be immortal. The truth of the assertion that **Cretans are always liars** also is reflected in the ancient phrase “to Cretanize,” which was used as a figure of speech for lying.

Cretans also had the reputation of being **evil beasts [and] lazy gluttons**. The idea behind **evil beasts** is that of behaving like a wild animal, living solely on the level of sensual appetites and passions. Such people are malicious and often savage and rapacious. The meaning of **lazy gluttons** is self-evident. Cretans hated to work but loved to eat. They were self-indulgent, greedy, lustful, overfed, and perhaps in poor physical condition. Paul affirmed that the six-hundred-year-old **testimony** of Epimenides about the Cretans was still **true**.

Reaction to the Men Who Must Be Silenced

For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. (1:13b–14)

For this cause, that is, because of the reasons just given, Titus was to forcefully and immediately confront the heretical teaching and ungodly living of the false teachers.

reprove them

reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith, (1:13b)

Because of the extreme spiritual danger that those men posed if they infected the church, Titus was to **reprove them severely**. **Severely** translates *apotomōs*, a compound adverb formed from the preposition *apo* and the verb *tennō*, which means “to cut,” as with a knife or ax. The reproof was to cut with penetrating force.

The severity of such a rebuke should be remedial. Titus was not to condemn the men but seek to correct their doctrinal error and personal sinfulness, in order **that they may be sound in the faith**. As someone has observed, “The surgeon of the soul only cuts to achieve a cure.” Like Timothy, therefore, Titus was to “reprove, rebuke, [and] exhort with great patience and instruction” (2 Tim. 4:2). “The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:24–25).

Paul himself was remarkably patient, as is particularly evident in his relationship with the immature, immoral, and doctrinally confused believers in Corinth, among whom he had personally ministered for about a year and a half. “I am writing these things while absent,” he told them in his second letter, “in order that when present I may not use severity [*apotomōs*], in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me, for building up and

not for tearing down” (2 Cor. 13:10). The spirit of kindness and humility that characterized Paul should characterize every leader in Christ’s church, as it was so perfectly by the Lord Himself in His incarnation. All believers, in fact, are to “have this attitude in [themselves] which was also in Christ Jesus, [who] emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:5, 7–8).

repudiate them

not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. (1:14)

Paying attention to carries the sense of giving heed to or devoting oneself to, in this case, heeding and devoting oneself to error. This is forbidden of all church leaders. Paul made this point most firmly in 2 Corinthians 6:14–18:

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “ ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,’ Says the Lord Almighty.”

That command not to be associated with unbelievers is in the context of religious and spiritual matters. Only evil is to be gained by linking up with those who teach or practice any form of false religion—precisely what the Corinthian believers were doing (see 1 Cor. 10:20–21).

In particular for the churches on Crete, such danger came from **Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.** The apostle gave an almost identical warning to Timothy, telling him not “to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith” (1 Tim. 1:4; 4:7).

Paul does not identify the particular **Jewish myths** and manmade **commandments** that were being promulgated. Some insight can be gained by remembering that ancient Hebrew had no numerals as such, but instead used a complex system that assigned a numerical value to each letter in the alphabet and to various combinations of letters, which, until the eighth or ninth century a.d., included no written vowels. The first Hebrew word (*brshth*, “in the beginning”) in Genesis 1:1, for example, had the numerical value of 913. *Brm* (“Abram”)

had the value of 318. A century or so after the Babylonian Captivity, many rabbis began adapting gnostic Greek numerology—the practice of assigning mystical meanings to numbers—to the Hebrew language. Under one such scheme (and there were many), it was believed that the secret in the letter-numbers in Abram's name meant that he had 318 servants.

Hebrew numerology was applied not only to the Hebrew Scriptures but also to the Talmud, a collection of authorized rabbinical interpretations of Scripture, especially the Mosaic Law, that began during the time of Ezra (ca. 450 b.c.) and continued until about a.d. 500. By New Testament times, many rabbis and other learned Jews—especially those who lived in areas where Greek philosophy was still dominant (as it was on Crete)—mixed ideas from Hebrew and Greek numerology and added their own allegorical fancies, making the resulting interpretations more bizarre than ever.

For several centuries, **Jewish** rabbis had been developing many traditional laws, identified here as the **commandments of men**. Those **commandments** probably referred to, and certainly included, legalistic ordinances and standards—most of them doubtless from the Talmud—that added to and often contradicted or nullified Scripture.

When a group of Pharisees and scribes (interpreters and teachers of the Law) asked Jesus, “ ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?’ He answered, ‘Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.” Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.’ He was also saying to them, ‘You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition’ ” (Mark 7:5–9; cf. Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:9).

Paul probably did not specify particular heresies because there were so many varieties. Had he failed to mention a certain heresy, some immature and undiscerning believers might have concluded that it was therefore excluded from this warning. The apostle rather admonished that everything that was taught in the name of Christ be measured against the Old Testament Scriptures and the teaching of the apostles.

The fact that false teachers in the Cretan churches were identified as **men who [turned] away from the truth** indicates that they had been exposed to **the truth** and had once acknowledged it, but later rejected it in favor of Satan-inspired and manmade myths, precepts, and traditions.

Evaluation of the Men Who Must be Silenced

To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to

know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed. (1:15–16)

Paul gives two divinely inspired evaluations of false teachers in the Cretan churches, evaluations that apply to false teachers in any age. First he assesses their inner lives and finds them to be corrupt. He then assesses their outer lives and finds them to be hypocritical and debauched.

their inner lives

To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. (1:15)

When a certain “Pharisee asked [Jesus] to have lunch with him, ... He went in, and reclined at the table. And when the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, ‘Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you’ ” (Luke 11:37–41). In other words, when a person is **pure** in heart and mind, his perspectives on **all things are pure**, and that inner purity always produces outer purity.

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 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 has always been the basic heresy of sacramental, sacerdotal, or ritualistic religion, whatever its form—Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Islamic, or other. 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).

In every age of human history since the Fall, men have been made right with God only through saving faith in Him. And, on the other hand, those who are not accepted by Him remain unsaved because they are **unbelieving**. Such things as lighting candles, burning incense, genuflecting, counting beads, repeating prescribed prayers, facing a certain direction when praying, having visions or mystical experiences, and even being baptized or partaking of the Lord’s Supper have absolutely no saving power. To the contrary, unless a practice, even one that is biblically commanded, is done as the fruit of a believing heart, it can become a formidable barrier to salvation and blessing.

In the words of the nineteenth-century Scottish theologian Patrick Fairbairn, those who trust in sacramentalism or other form of works righteousness “have a fountain of pollution which spreads itself over and infects everything about them. Their food and drink, their possessions, their employment, their comforts, their actions—all are in the reckoning of God tainted with impurity, because they are putting away from them that which alone has for the soul regenerating and cleansing efficacy” (Quoted in D. Edmond Hiebert, *Titus and Philemon*, Every man’s Bible Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1957], pp. 44–45).

To those who are defiled and unbelieving, Paul says, **nothing is pure**, or can be pure, because **both their mind and their conscience are defiled**. All their perspectives and actions are infected with their inner defilement.

It is “not what enters into the mouth [that] defiles the man,” Jesus said, “but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man” (Matt. 15:11). When Peter asked Him to explain what He meant, the Lord replied, “Are you still lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and is eliminated? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man” (vv. 15–20). A person is morally and spiritually **defiled** by sin in his heart and mind, not by material things that he handles or eats.

It was not until several years after Pentecost that Peter came to fully understand that truth. After his three-time vision of the sheet filled with unclean animals and the heavenly command to “Arise, ... kill and eat!” the apostle “was greatly perplexed in mind as to what the vision which he had seen might be” (Acts 10:10–17). Only after he obeyed the Spirit’s command to witness to Cornelius, a Gentile and a Roman centurion, and observed the salvation of that man and his household and their being filled with the Holy Spirit (vv. 20–48) did he finally comprehend that Gentiles were not ceremonially “unclean” and that the gospel was offered as freely to them as to Jews. “If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ,” he later testified, “who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” (11:17). “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world,” Paul asked Colossian believers, “why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” (Col. 2:20–23). “Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim. 4:4–5).

their outer lives

They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed. (1:16)

Only God, of course, can evaluate a person's heart. But by the way they live, unbelievers usually betray their unbelief. By their words, they profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him.

People who trust in their works of righteousness also tend to have an air of superiority about them, believing, like the ancient Greek gnostics, that they are "in the know" about religious matters and live on a level above other people. They not only **profess to know God** but to know Him better than others. The truth, however, is that they do not know Him at all, much less have a saving relationship to Him. **By their deeds, they deny Him**, and because of their unbelief (v. 16), He denies them (cf. Matt. 10:33). They hold "to a form of godliness, [but] they have denied its power" (2 Tim. 3:5). That is precisely what Jesus taught when He said of false teachers, "You will know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16).

Self-righteous false teachers not only are proud and feel superior to others but are utterly **detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed**. The noun form of the adjective *bdeluktos* (**dete stable**) was used by Jesus to describe Antichrist, "the abomination [*bdelugma*] of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (Matt. 24:15). John declares that "nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination [*bdelugma*] and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). **Detestable** false teachers will have no place in heaven.

Disobedient lives betray a professed faith in God. The ungodly continue to walk "according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2). Because they attempt to "deceive [God's people] with empty words, ... the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6; cf. Col. 3:6). And, as Jeremiah had proclaimed many centuries earlier, "they [do not] furnish [God's] people the slightest benefit" (Jer. 23:32). They are **worthless for any good deed**. The term for **worthless** is *adokimos*, which means "disqualified or rejected" (cf. 2 Tim. 3:8).³

³ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1996). *Titus* (pp. 53–68). Chicago: Moody Press.