

Disruptive Pretenders

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Date: 28 January 2024

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[0 : 0 0] All right, well, we are continuing our way through the letter that Paul wrote to Titus on the island of Crete. For those of you who are visiting or haven't been here in a while, we started a new series looking at this letter of Paul's.

Paul, of course, was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, which means that he was a spokesperson sent by Christ to speak Christ's words to the churches and to give them the instructions and guidance they needed as they began to be established all over the Mediterranean world.

And Paul and Titus have been co-workers and partners in this work of proclaiming the gospel to various places all around the Mediterranean Sea.

And one of those places was an island called Crete, which is just southeast of Greece. And last week we heard about how Paul left Titus on that island.

And the reason was to put in order what was left unfinished. And we saw that the main work that Titus was to do in each of the churches was to appoint elders.

[1 : 1 1] He was to appoint leaders in the churches, men of good reputation, men of godly character, men who had proven themselves at home with their families, and men who were holding firmly to the word of God, to the gospel, and to all the teaching from God that goes with it.

And as we heard last week, there were two reasons that they had to be men who hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught. First, so that they can encourage, exhort, instruct others by sound doctrine.

And second, so that they can refute or correct or expose those who oppose it. Now, why is this so important? Well, Paul is about to tell Titus.

Let me read it for us, starting in verse 9. So an elder must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group.

[2 : 3 3] They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach, and that for the sake of dishonest gain.

One of Crete's own prophets has said it. Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. This saying is true.

Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith, and will pay no attention to Jewish myths, or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth.

To the pure, all things are pure. But to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.

[3 : 42] So Paul tells us why it's so important to have qualified elders, men who are holding firmly to the trustworthy message, the gospel, the word of God. This is important, he says, because there are many rebellious people.

The word here means insubordinate. People who are not subject to authority, but are ignoring it, or are even pushing back against it. And these are not just like any of the people on Crete.

They are people who are amidst the churches, among the church people on Crete. People who are stirring up trouble, and inciting others to go against the trustworthy teaching, of Christ.

Paul says that these people are full of meaningless talk. He's saying that their words are empty, irrelevant, that they lack any real substantial value.

In fact, Paul says they are full of deception. They are deceivers, misleading people. Now just how aware of this, or intentional of this, they are, we don't know.

[4 : 49] But Paul gives us a little bit to understand the place that they're coming from. He says, especially those of the circumcision group. And that's a reference to some of these people being Jewish.

Some of these people who are insubordinate, stirring up trouble, divisive. They're Jews. And they're not the sort of believing Jew that Paul is.

They're perhaps more like the Pharisees, and the religious leaders in Israel. They don't seem to be embracing the trustworthy message about Christ as Messiah. Perhaps they were similar to the Judaizers, who were infiltrating the churches in Galatia, advocating that people must keep the law, and be circumcised, and live a good enough life to be accepted by God.

We don't know the full extent of their teaching. But it's anti-Christ. It's anti-Christian enough that Paul says, in verse 11, they must be silenced.

They're disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach. And that, for the sake of dishonest gain. So this is a real problem there on the island of Crete.

[6 : 08] There are deceptive, insubordinate, some Jewish, some not, teachers, and they are causing division and trouble in the churches.

And it seems they're even working some kind of scheme to make money at this, to make a profit off of this. And Paul says to Titus, you must silence them.

Rebuke them sharply. Verse 13. So if you can imagine yourself as Titus, I mean, this is not an easy assignment. Paul is basically saying, you need to go toe-to-toe with these influencers, these teachers.

You need to silence them. You need to call them to repent. Down in verse 14, Paul implies that they're teaching Jewish myth. They're even giving commands.

They've kind of set themselves up as authorities. And down in verse 14, Paul says that these are merely human commands of men who reject the truth.

[7 : 12] So tell the people in the churches on the island of Crete to pay no attention to those teachings. And then in the midst of all this, Paul quotes one of Crete's, the island's own prophets, in verse 12.

He says, one of Crete's own prophets has said it. Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.

This saying is true, says Paul. So evidently, the people on this island, in general, were known for a few things.

They were known for being liars. And not just a little, but a lot. Always liars. So they were known for dishonesty, cheating, scamming, swindling, misleading.

That was the norm. They were known for being evil brutes. Quite literally, evil beasts. Or wicked animals. Probably a nickname that they had earned from their just deceptive and downright malicious dealings with each other and with outsiders.

[8 : 27] So these guys are not known on this island for being trustworthy, for being kind. And finally, they were known for being lazy gluttons. They were known for their idleness, for being lazy, not wanting to work or put in any effort for anything.

And they were gluttons. The picture we get here is of people indulging to the max in whatever cravings or pleasures they can get their hands on. So I don't know how many of you have ever seen the movie Pirates of the Caribbean.

If you've never seen it, don't bother watching it. But if you have seen it, this sounds a lot like Tortuga, that sort of pirate haven or pit stop where people are constantly, you know, swashbuckling each other and double-crossing each other and eating and drinking themselves into a stupor, spending themselves broke and swindling others out of their goods and money.

quite the reputation. Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons. And Paul says, this saying is true.

That basically sums it up. Therefore, says Paul, rebuke them sharply so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth.

[9 : 53] And it seems that here Paul has in view both the false teachers that he just mentioned as well as those in the churches who might listen to these people. Rebuke them sharply, says Paul.

And notice the goal of that rebuke. It isn't just to scold them or to make them feel ashamed or to get them to shut up or smarten up.

No, it's a sharp rebuke so that they will be sound in the faith. We're talking righteous rebuke. We're talking restorative rebuke.

A rebuke that aims to see them turn away from this old way of living that's so common around them and turn to the way of Christ and to the way that fits with a faith in Jesus.

Well, as we consider the culture of Crete, if you were here last Sunday, you can see there's quite a contrast between the requirements of the elders and the leaders up in verses 5 to 9 and the general conduct of the people that are all around them on this island.

[11 : 01] Elders, and as we said last week, really, all mature believers are to be trustworthy, are to be faithful, are to be honest, are to be disciplined and self-controlled in the midst of a culture that is not trustworthy, that is deceitful, that is wicked, lazy, self-indulgent.

Let's continue on in verse 15. Paul says, To the pure, all things are pure. But to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure.

This might be specifically pointed at the circumcision group. The Pharisees, the ones who opposed Christ, they were known for their strict standards of ritual cleanliness.

They were known for all these ceremonial washings that they did because everything is unclean. They would wash their hands ceremonially, maybe even sometimes take a bath to cleanse themselves if they went into the marketplace because maybe some of the spiritual filth on the people got onto me.

And Paul seems to be refuting that kind of mindset with a little bit of a gross exaggeration to make a point. He says, To those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure.

[12 : 26] But in reality, he says, To those who are pure, to those who are truly pure, washed clean by Christ, all things are pure. Now that doesn't mean that sinful behaviors become pure.

Of course not. It means that all the good things that God created and has given to man for his benefit and his enjoyment and his use, all of those things are clean.

All of those things are pure. All of those things are good. By faith in the truth of God, we who believe in Christ and have been washed and made pure, we see the beauty of those things, the goodness of those things, the benefit of those things.

Many man-made religions have treated marriage or sex or certain kinds of food or certain kinds of work as though they are dirty and defiling of a person.

But to those who belong to Christ and have been made pure through faith in him, we see all these things with a right perspective now. All that man-made religiousness is corrupt.

[13 : 33] It's crooked. Paul goes on. He says, They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.

This is a pretty scathing rebuke. And it seems to refer not to the true believers in the church, but to the false teachers and to anyone else who's causing trouble.

And it doesn't speak to their future. It doesn't predict how they will respond to this rebuke from Titus, but it speaks to how they are at present. They are disobedient.

So not just spiritually apathetic, but worse. They're doing the opposite of Christ's commands. Paul says, They are detestable.

This is a really strong word. Abhorrent is basically a synonym. That's quite a thing to say about a person. But right now, they are doing abhorrent and detestable things.

[14 : 37] Deceiving families, swindling them out of their money. And finally, Paul says, They are unfit for doing anything good.

Again, another very strong statement. At the least, this means that these people are disqualified from serving in church leadership and probably from any other role in the church.

In their present state of defiance and disbelief, they're not only no benefit, but they're dangerous. They're damaging. They're disruptive. Nothing good can come from them unless they have a serious change of heart and repent.

But probably the clearest and most startling statement comes before all this in verse 16. They claim to know God, but by their actions, they deny Him.

They claim to know God, but by their actions, they deny Him. So these teachers, these influencers amidst the churches, they're not the kind of people who are promoting other world religions.

[15 : 54] They're not promoting Greek gods or Egyptian gods or satanic worship or atheism. They're the kind of people who claim to know God, the one true God.

They are professing believers in God. They say with their mouths, I believe in God, but, says Paul, by their actions, they deny Him.

So with their mouths, they're saying, I believe in God, but Paul says, with their actions, they're saying, I don't believe in God. You've heard the saying, actions speak louder than words.

Well, this is kind of a similar form of that. There are people there in Crete whose actions are speaking louder than their words. They're claiming to know God, and yet the way they are living betrays that profession.

It shows it to be false. It's possible to be a professing believer in God, but not be a Christian.

[17 : 02] Believing in Jesus, as we often say here, is enough. It's all that it takes to be saved. That's the good news of Christ. He saves us as a gift of grace to us, as we just mentioned earlier during the prayer time.

All we do to receive that gift is believe. believe. And there are people who truly believe from their hearts. And there are people who say they believe, but really do not.

Sometimes we call this spurious faith. Spurious means not genuine, not authentic. It means that it's a faith that on the surface looks true, but at its root, at its core, it just lacks the characteristics, the qualities of true faith.

And if you were here with us when we were working through the gospel of John and going through that, we ran into this kind of spurious faith a few times. Jesus, on more than one occasion, exposed the spurious faith of people in Israel.

Many of them claimed to believe in God, and yet just like the people in this passage, they were denying him by their actions. They were saying, we are children of God, we are children of Abraham.

[18 : 24] And Jesus was saying to them, no, you are of your father, the devil. That's from John chapter 8. Jesus exposed their so-called faith in God for what it really was.

Empty words. Some of these people at the same time were plotting to murder Jesus. They were filled with greed and pride and covetousness.

They were hypocritical. They were always judging others but never judging themselves. They were living for the praise of other people but not for the praise of God.

Not only did we see this in the religious leaders but we saw it even in the followers of Jesus. We saw that many followed him around and were quite enamored by him.

They liked the miracles that he was doing. They found the teaching very interesting. It tickled their fancy. And yet, they didn't believe his words.

[19 : 27] And when Jesus started saying some things that weren't popular or doing some things that were getting him into trouble with the religious leaders, suddenly these followers, they just melted away.

They disappeared. Probably many of them had been baptized and had been saying, I believe in Jesus. I believe you're the Messiah. But then when things grew difficult or unpopular, they quit following Jesus.

Their spurious faith was exposed. These are the people in Jesus' parable of the sower, if you know the parable, who receive the word with joy.

Yes, I believe. But then in the time of testing or opposition or difficulty, their faith withers and they bear no fruit. Jesus says it's because they have no root.

Their faith is only on the surface. It's shallow. it's up here but it's not in here. Spurious faith does not save a person.

[20 : 35] James makes this quite clear in his New Testament letter. James chapter 2. James writes, What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?

Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, Oh, go in peace, keep warm, and be well fed, but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, You have faith, I have deeds.

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God? Good.

Even the demons believe that and shudder. So a profession of faith in God or in Jesus, it must be weighed, it must be proved by how a person lives, because how we live reveals what we really believe.

[21 : 52] In the words of Jesus, you will know them by their fruit. Jesus said it this way, he said, watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

By their fruit, you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Thus, by their fruit, you will recognize them. So this is the way, says Paul, to discern false teachers, false prophets.

Do their actions, does the way that they live say, yes, Jesus is Lord? Do they generally obey his commands and seek to do what is pleasing to Christ?

[23 : 03] Or do their actions, does the way they live say, no, Jesus is not really the Lord? does their living match their profession?

Now, this doesn't mean that true believers never sin. Of course not. When it comes to these things, we're talking about the general pattern of a person's life. Is there good fruit growing, or is it bad fruit?

How does this apply to us? Well, these words might be helpful to us in understanding that there's a clear contrast between a true believer and an unbeliever, between a Christian and a person of the world.

These words might also be helpful as we seek to sift through some of the voices that are coming at us in our world, especially those who claim to have discernment and that we're all missing out on some important understanding or teaching.

But before we get to examining others and discerning others, God's word is clear that we must first examine ourselves. Jesus said it this way.

[24 : 16] He said, Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye when all the time there's a plank in your own eye?

You hypocrite. First, take the plank out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. Before we get to examining and discerning others, we must first examine ourselves.

Paul said it this way in his letter to the church at Rome. He said, If you're convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law, the embodiment of knowledge and truth, you then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself?

You who preach against stealing, do you steal? And Paul goes on. Again, before we get to examining others, we need to first examine ourselves.

Paul actually says it point blank in his letter to the Corinthians. He says examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you?

[25 : 40] Unless, of course, you fail the test. And this is really the invitation of this passage in Titus, isn't it? Here are these people who are claiming to know God, yet by their actions they are denying him.

The invitation here is for each of us, to each of us, to look at ourselves. Am I claiming to know God? Am I claiming to be a follower of Jesus?

Do my actions claim that as well? If I believe Christ is the king, will I not, on the whole, in general, as my pattern, obey, his commands?

Now, sometimes I know we hear these words, take the log out of your own eye and examine yourselves, and we may wonder, well, how do we do that? What does it mean to examine myself?

Do we just pray and ask God about it? Well, I think that's a good start, but then what do we do after that? Do we wait for a feeling of confirmation that we pass the test?

[26 : 55] Christ? The Bible tells us that God's spirit does live within his people, and that his spirit testifies with our spirit that we are his children. So yes, there is an inward feeling, there is an inward convincing that's going on in our hearts if we belong to Christ and we have his spirit in us.

But here's the rub. For those who do not really believe in Christ, they too seem to have some kind of an inward feeling, an inward convincing going on in their hearts too.

Somehow they justify themselves. They say, yeah, yeah, I believe. I'm a good person. I'm okay with God. Feelings are maybe not especially reliable in indicating what the truth of the matter is.

Both the believer and the unbeliever feel they pass the test. But the Bible tells us that we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Romans 14 10, 2 Corinthians 5, verse 10. And what will be the basis? What will be the standard by which we're judged? Is it by how strong we felt in our relationship to Jesus?

[28 : 17] The answer is no. It will be based on what we did. how we lived. What we did, how we lived, that will be the evidence of whether our faith in Jesus was genuine or spurious.

What was the fruit of our faith? Was ours a true living faith with deeds, good deeds flowing out of it, good fruit coming from it?

or was it a dead faith from which nothing good came? Did we receive the word of God with joy and persevere and bear fruit?

Or did we receive it with joy but then fall away from Christ and go after the chasing of our own pleasures and idols and just kind of wither spiritually?

This kind of self-examination, I mean it does require prayer but it also requires us to take a sober look at our daily lives and whether or not we're living in obedience to Jesus.

[29 : 29] Not perfectly of course but as the general pattern. if that's not the case, if you look at your life and you look at the pages of the Bible and you see what Jesus is commanding and you look at your life and you see that that's out of sync.

I'm not living in obedience to Jesus. Maybe you realize that you're just doing a meager, bare minimum kind of obedience to Jesus just to appease your conscience.

If that's you, let me bring the words of Christ. to bear on you this morning. You are in great danger. You might be able to fool others around you but you can't fool God.

The final resting place for those who do not have true faith in Jesus, the Bible says is the lake of fire. Hell.

God's God's God. And it's not just a one-time mention. These are the words of God, the words of Christ again and again to us in many different places and passages. Jesus talked about it.

[30 : 43] How eternal punishment is the just sentence that we deserve if we do not from the heart receive, believe in Jesus Christ because all of us have sinned and fall short of God's glory.

The good news is God doesn't want you to go there. He loves you. He's calling you today, if you haven't done this already, to repent and to fully embrace Jesus Christ, the Savior, that he has provided.

God, maybe you're here and you know that you don't believe, at least not deep down in here anyway, as you should. Maybe you feel like you're on the edge of a cliff and jumping off that cliff and surrendering your life and your heart to Jesus almost feels like suicide, feels like death.

How could I do that? And maybe you feel the, you know, I'm just going to back away from the edge. I'm just going to kind of go back to the safety and the comforts of my life and how it's, how, the way that I've been living.

But maybe today, this morning, you hear King Jesus calling you to jump off the cliff of faith. Surrendering your life to Jesus, it does feel like a kind of death to yourself.

[32 : 10] Jesus said so. He said, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself and take up his cross, that's death, and follow me.

For whoever wants to save their life, that's back away from the cliff, keep doing what I've been doing. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, said Jesus.

But whoever loses their life, that's jumping off the cliff of faith, whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.

If you haven't already done this, I urge you, jump off the cliff of faith into the loving arms of Jesus. He will catch you.

True belief in Jesus, at least at the beginning, at the outset, it does feel like a suicide. It feels like a death. But it's the way to find true life.

[33 : 12] it's the way to find that lasting joy and peace and hope and life that you've been looking for. It's the way to have your sins forgiven and to enter into that restored relationship with a Father in heaven who loves you.

I hope and I pray that when that final day comes, not a single one of us in this room will have this for our life verse. They claimed to know God, but by their actions, they denied him.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you for your word. And I know that it's not sometimes what we want to hear, that it's sometimes hard words, not the most pleasant things to think about.

But we thank you that you speak the truth to us because you love us. And I pray that these words would bear great fruit in our lives. I pray that every one of us would surrender completely to you and that our faith in you would grow and that you would turn our lives upside down and change us for the good that you long to do in us and for your own glory.

Thank you for sending Jesus to save us. Thank you for your Holy Spirit. We commit ourselves to you in his name. Amen.