

# The Cretan Problem

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[ 0 : 00 ] There were individuals in the churches in Crete who believed and promoted ideas that actually contradicted the gospel of Jesus and sound doctrine, healthy doctrine as we defined it last week, that actually produces spiritual fitness.

Paul said that they profess to know God, but their beliefs and their behaviors actually deny the God that they say they know. They were a threat to the health of the church, and they needed to be confronted at least, and if necessary, excommunicated.

I'm calling this the Cretan problem, but we all know that the danger wasn't limited to Crete. Assaults against the gospel are present in every church.

The Cretan problem is a Cornelius problem, and it will need to continually be addressed in churches until the Lord returns.

This will always be an issue that we have to confront, maybe even sometimes confront in and of ourselves. Now, if we're going to understand this text appropriately, we need to recognize Paul is not moving on to a new topic of conversation here.

[ 1 : 20 ] He's addressing the same subject that he's been covering in the last few verses, just from a different angle. He's dealing with the subject of faithful church elders, but from the perspective of the false teaching that they will need to confront when it begins to come into the church.

We need to also recognize that Paul is not concerned, at least at this point, he's not concerned with the pagan culture outside of the church.

He's not concerned with the antagonistic worldviews and behaviors of the culture that would assault the church externally.

He's concerned about that. That's not irrelevant, but that's not his primary concern here. Actually, his primary concern in this text is actually the assaults against the gospel that come from inside the church.

People who have taken the gospel of Jesus and distorted it, perverted it, maybe even marginally done so, but to the harm of their own faith and certainly to the harm of others.

[ 2 : 33 ] It's the situation of my friend on the bus. He might have been a true believer, but even the marginal kind of detour from the truth of the gospel that he was espousing, at least in that moment, was very harmful to others who might have subscribed as a result of it to something that's not actually true.

So it was crucial for Titus then to take his task seriously. His task to appoint faithful elders that would protect the flock of God, preserve the gospel of Jesus in its fullness, and fight against any and all heresies that would contradict it.

Three primary things I want to point out to you in this text as we work through it. The first thing is we see Paul describing the problem. Paul is describing the problem. Look at verse 10.

For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers, and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silent since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons, and this testimony is true. Well, the opening four in verse 10 links the discussion back to the purpose and qualifications of an elder in verse 9.

[ 4 : 05 ] Just look at verse 9 with me again. That these elders must hold firm to the trustworthy word, that they may be able to give instruction and sound doctrine, and then also to rebuke those who contradict it.

And then immediately after that, Paul says, For there will be many who are insubordinate to the gospel. Titus needed to appoint men who knew their Bibles well, who were committed to the

fullness of the gospel message, and were able and willing to rebuke anyone who contradicted those truths.

So the fundamental reason for healthy leadership in a church is rooted in the protection and preservation of God's people.

So we spent now, this would be the third week that we've been dealing particularly with this topic in Titus chapter 1. And you may say that all of this stuff about leaders and polity and the things that we're going through right now, is it really all that important?

And it actually is very important, at least foundationally important, to the survival of the church.

When I say survive, I don't mean to take the future of the church out of the hands of the Lord and put it into the hands of man, but that the Lord uses the actions of men in order to accomplish His sovereign purposes.

[ 5 : 30 ] We see that many times in the Bible. And it's necessary that there be faithful pastors established, because there are many enemies of the gospel.

And these enemies will inevitably come from unsuspecting places, even the church itself. Jesus said this in Matthew chapter 7.

He said, Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing. Inwardly, they're ravening wolves. But that's not what they look like.

They won't be the people that you first suspect when they walk through the door of the church. It may take some time to recognize exactly the condition and nature of their theology and of their hearts, but beware, because it will happen.

There will be people that come into the church that do not actually belong to the flock, and they will seek to destroy it. That's a warning from Christ Himself. Paul says it to the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20.

[ 6 : 36 ] I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And from among your own selves, these are the elders in the church.

He said there may even come a time where one of you start to speak twisted things that actually turn people away from the gospel. And what would be the motive in that?

Paul says to draw disciples after them to gain a following for themselves, to build up a reputation for themselves at all costs. Well, a pastor who doesn't know his Bible or isolates himself from the flock of God, the people, will not be able to recognize these things.

He won't be able to confront these things because he won't know that they're there. So Paul says, Titus, put faithful men there that know their Bibles, men who smell like sheep, who are going to be with the people, who recognize these things and will deal with them as they come.

That's precisely what was happening in Crete. And it was Titus's responsibility to set things in order for the good of the church in the long term. And then Paul tells him in the midst of this, this is how you can spot these false teachers in the church.

[ 7 : 54 ] And he gives four things, I think, here that are helpful. Number one, he says, notice their talk. Notice their talk. Look at verse 10. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.

The first thing that must be examined is, what are these people actually saying? These people that are trying to influence you with their teaching and with their ideas, listen to what they're saying. What is their talk?

Paul doesn't describe, at least at this point, the precise error. He deals with it more from a general teaching perspective.

And he names three things. First, he says they're insubordinate, which in this case is not a rebellion against leadership directly. It's a rebellion against the truth of the gospel, the full fundamental message of the truth of Jesus.

That's what they're insubordinate against. False teachers rarely outright deny the gospel, but they are never satisfied with the gospel either. So watch for it.

[ 9 : 02 ] They may be saying Jesus. They may be saying baptism. They may be saying all the things. They're using all the words that you would like to hear, but listen to what they're actually saying. Are they satisfied with Christ alone, or are they happy to accommodate Christ so long as they can add their own kind of twist to it as well?

They're insubordinate to the gospel, at least to the faithful message of the gospel. He says they're empty talkers. This is the idea of worthless, unhelpful speech.

The things that they talk about, you might feel motivated, or maybe because of their charisma, it might help you feel a little bit better, but you're not exactly sure what they actually said. Just a cursory scroll through Facebook will show you many examples of this. People kind of blindly share statements that don't really make any sense, and they're very excited, and you're not really sure why they're excited, because you can't really understand what's actually happening, what's being said here.

Well, the truth is nothing's really being said. Donald Guthrie said they are empty-headed in their teaching, doing much talking, but saying nothing.

[10:16] They're empty talkers. Then he says they're deceivers. They're those whose doctrine leads people away from knowing the truth. They're self-deceived, and in many cases will be willing to fabricate lies to gain a following or give the appearance of spiritual elitism.

We see this primarily in the cults. The Joseph Smiths and the Mariette Bakers and those who would fabricate entire lies in order to gain a following that they can then domineer over, that they can then establish for themselves, not actually based on the truth of God.

Of course, there's other versions to see of that as well. So we look at their talk. Number two, he says, look at their effect. Look at their effect. Look again at verse 11, just the first part of it.

They must be silenced since they are upsetting whole families. What's the effect of their teaching? How does that affect the unity of the church?

There's only two other places in the New Testament where this word or this phrase for upsetting is used. One is in 2 Timothy 2.

[11:34] Paul says that because they were teaching that Jesus' second coming had already occurred, that Hymenaeus and Philetus were upsetting the faith of some.

The second time it's used is in John 2 and verse 15, when Jesus was flipping tables in the temple. And it's this same word for upsetting.

The idea here is that the teaching of these people, what they're doing, maybe in the things that they're saying or maybe in the way that they're saying it, it's like flipping over the faith of people in the church.

It's destructive. It doesn't edify the church. It doesn't unite the church around the person and the work of Christ. It actually divides the church. It's destructive.

Then he says, check their motives. What do their motives seem to be in their teaching? What are they trying to accomplish? Well, Paul says they're upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

[12:35] The implication being they know it isn't true. They know they shouldn't teach it, but they're teaching it anyways to benefit themselves in some way. Paul had warned Timothy that there would come a time when the churches would accumulate to themselves teachers having itching ears that will scratch whatever their particular itch was.

that he would teach them whatever was accommodating to their desires and passions. And here he says there's going to come men who take advantage of that situation, who will recognize that there are people that just want to be taught what they want to be taught, and they're only going to find the people who will do it, and they'll pay good money for those who will.

These people will abuse the church. Brian Chappell said this expression communicates their mercenary intent. What drives such men is the base motive of selfish advantage.

They're taking advantage of the people of God rather than actually seeking to shepherd the people of God. Finally, he says look at their model. Look at their model.

Verse 12, this is where he makes the statement quoting, I can't remember the man, if I tried to pronounce his name, it would probably be wrong, but this prophet from Crete, about 600 years BC, made this statement, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons, and this is true.

[14:10] That seems to be a bit of a departure from what Paul is saying, isn't it? Like where does this come from in the text? Why is he actually making this statement at this particular time, and why does it seem to be so insulting?

Well, he's saying that what I've just described to be true of these false teachers is actually showing that they're modeling their lives after the culture around them, not actually after the scriptures and the things that Christ has modeled for us.

He says this is true because it was true. Cretans were known for their lies. Their most famous lie was that they possessed the tomb of the god Zeus. They were known so much for their lies that

there's a Greek word established hundreds of years before Christ that came from the word Crete, and it means to lie.

The Greek language was shaped around the fact that Cretans were known to be liars. He says they're evil beasts. Crete was known to not actually have any wild animals on it.

It's an island. Didn't have wild animals. But other people, even secular, non-Christian writers of that time, acknowledged that though they did not have wild beasts, I think this was Plutarch said this, though they did not have wild beasts, the people themselves took the responsibility of behaving like wild beasts.

[ 15 : 32 ] It's what they were known for as a culture. Paul says this is exactly what these false teachers are like.

Cretans are liars, and he's already called the false teachers deceivers. Cretans are evil beasts. False teachers are upsetting whole families. They're ravaging the flock. Cretans are lazy gluttons. False teachers were, they're just concerned about shameful gain. You say, well, what does this mean for us in Cornelius, North Carolina? Well, we have our own culture. We can identify its markers.

Materialism is one of them. Pride and arrogance would be another. We can start to establish this is all the things that would identify the Western American culture that we live in.

And then we start to look at the teachers that we've put, the influencers that we've allowed to come into our homes and into our churches. And we say, what is their life and ministry actually modeled after?

[ 16 : 34 ] Does this look like Christ? Or does this actually look like the world in which we live? He says, this is an identifying marker. You need to watch out. Well, there's many enemies of the gospel.

Identifying markers are the same. Churches need faithful shepherds who will help God's people recognize error and confront these teachers when they assault the gospel.

That's the point here. So he describes the problem. Second, he tells us how to deal with the problem. How to deal with the problem. Paul says the only proper way of dealing with it is direct confrontation.

Something that most of us probably are loathe to do. I mean, who really likes confrontation? You're weird if you like confrontation. That's not normal. Modern sensibilities would push against Paul's methods and language here.

But we need to understand what's at stake. He wasn't advocating for arrogance. He's not advocating harshness. But he knew that tolerating error would destroy the church, not preserve it.

[ 17 : 48 ] That's what's at stake. We look at the big picture here of Titus. Paul's concerned that this church will survive, that the gospel will be preserved in the long term, not just in the time of the apostles.

A friend of mine wisely, I think, said a few years ago, avoiding hard conversations doesn't preserve unity. It fakes it. It doesn't preserve unity.

It fakes it. The lowest common denominator idea of doctrinal fidelity is not the path to unity in the church. It's not going to actually produce unity in the long run.

Error needs to be confronted. And the text provides two ways for us to do it. The first way is redemptive rebuke. Redemptive rebuke.

Look at verse 13. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, he says, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

[ 18 : 54 ] It's interesting, in this instance, Paul, he's coming short of demanding excommunication. That's different from how he commanded Timothy in 1 Timothy in dealing with the false teachers there.

That suggests that the issue in Crete wasn't quite as developed as it was in Ephesus. But Titus was to rebuke these false teachers and their doctrines with urgency and with authority.

We see the authority actually in chapter 2. Look at verse 15 of chapter 2. Declare these things, Titus. Exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

So there was a spirit with which Titus was to lovingly, graciously, but firmly, authoritatively deal with these false teachers in the church.

This was going to set a pattern for these elders that he was establishing. Something that would be intended by Paul then to continue on in the way that error is dealt with.

[ 19 : 56 ] But there's two questions that I think have, that we need to consider as we think about this idea of rebuke and especially sharp rebuke. The first question is this. We need to ask, what merits rebuke?

What actually, that's a strong word. And the way that Paul uses it here, rebuking sharply, is that he's using rebuke in the most severest sense possible.

So what actually merits this? What is it that we should be concerned to rebuke in this way? And I think the first answer is we have to acknowledge that not every disagreement necessitates the kind of rebuke intended in this text.

In fact, I think we'd all agree that not every disagreement requires rebuke at all or dressing at all. It's not the Bible's way of giving us permission to just let everybody know what we don't like about them and how they need to be more like us.

I tell Julie all the time, if everybody was just like me, that's not really what's happening here.

Sometimes we will take passages like this and we'll kind of use this as an excuse to just constantly confront people.

[ 21 : 08 ] That's the weird people that like confrontation for some reason. That's not really what he's saying to do. In fact, too much division happens when self-appointed watchdogs castigate other believers for disagreements that are unrelated to the gospel.

If there's anything we've learned in the last two and a half years, it's that Christianity is prone to this. Taking things that are not directly related to the gospel and elevating them to the level of the gospel so that we start to castigate, even publicly through social media, all the things we don't like about what all the other Christians are doing that actually doesn't have anything to do with Christ.

Some of you are in the medical field and you understand what medical triage is. Medical triage is a pattern. It's a systematic way of looking and assessing a patient's needs to determine which order and with what level of urgency those needs need to be met.

It prevents us from looking at someone with a broken finger and treating them with the same kind of urgency as timing as someone who has cardiac arrest. Okay, there's a difference.

You understand that. Al Mohler routinely encourages churches to institute what we would call spiritual triage or theological triage where we systematically, with a disciplined effort, look at the controversies that are around, that we look at the issues that arise in the church and we helpfully and prayerfully discern which thing needs urgent attention, which thing needs attention, but maybe not urgently, which things don't need really attention at all.

[ 22 : 53 ] They're going to be fine. They're going to heal themselves over time. I think we would be helped to do this as churches. We would be helped to do this as believers.

Maybe before you decide to rebuke somebody, maybe here's some questions you could ask. Does their belief or behavior deny or distort the gospel?

Is it a gospel issue here? And if it is, it needs to be dealt with. It has to be confronted. If it's not confronted, they may be okay, but everybody that's listened to them will not be okay.

For the good of the church and for the good of the preservation of the gospel, those things must be dealt with. Is the disagreement a secondary issue that's important, but doesn't necessitate a sharp rebuke?

Maybe a passionate discussion, but not a sharp rebuke. We need to be able to discern the difference in those things.

[ 23 : 59 ] Are they committed to willful, blatant sin against God? That's a gospel issue. Those things need to be confronted. We have plenty of help in the New Testament to discern that.

Is the issue a matter of conscience? Or is it plainly revealed to us in the Bible? And by plainly revealed, I don't mean you have to jump through three or four hoops to get to your position.

I mean, it's just like the main things are the plain things and the plain things are the main things, right? Is the Bible actually very plain that this is wrong, that they have a wrong position on this? And it's not just that we disagree in the way that we've come to our conclusions.

We need to ask ourselves that. Are they leading people away from Christ? Needs confrontation. Is it a speck and beam type situation?

Remember when Jesus talked about judgment, he said, some of you are going around, you're trying to take the speck out of people's eyes and you got this log coming out of your head. He says, go deal with the log that's in your head and then you can come and deal with other people's issues too.

[ 25 : 04 ] You're trying to clean everybody else's closets. Barry Bond said one time, he said, you're trying to clean up everybody else's closet. You need to go clean your own closet first, then you can go deal with somebody else's closet. He said, he's a great theologian, Barry Bonds.

Maybe the last question would be, do I really understand what's happening? Do I have a full understanding of exactly what this person thinks and is doing and is participating in?

Or am I kind of just making some assumptions that I probably shouldn't make before I create division and contention? Those things will be helpful to us, won't they? In the context of this passage, sharp rebuke is reserved for anything that contradicts verse nine, the trustworthy word of the gospel and sound doctrine that produces spiritual fitness.

Those are the things that require the rebuke. That's the measure that Paul gives us for the things that we actually need to confront. So that's the first question, and we need to think about it.

What merits this kind of rebuke before we do it? The second question is this. What's actually the goal of our rebuke? What are we trying to accomplish in this? Well, Paul helps us here.

[ 26 : 21 ] Look again at verse 13. Therefore, rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith. Notice the redemptive purpose of the rebuke.

It served the purpose of restoring these individuals to soundness in the faith. It was to rescue them from devotion to Jewish myths and commands.

In other words, it wasn't rebuke for rebuke's sake. The purpose of the one confronting the error should not be merely to win an argument or to demonstrate authority.

His heart's desire should be the restoration of the one who has fallen. Every time we see confrontation in the New Testament, even in the harshest forms of church discipline in the New Testament, the spirit of the confrontation, the end goal of what is happening is not just to gain a victory over one person, but to win them for Christ.

To win them to the gospel, to restore them to faithfulness. Brian Chappell wrote, to love the gospel, to fight for it, and at the same time desire that its truths capture the hearts of our enemies is what God requires of those who would differ from the world.

[ 27 : 43 ] The world understands hating those who oppose you. What contrasts those true to the Savior is the desire that all, even our opponents, would come to the knowledge of the truth.

Now, I have to remind myself of this routinely. That when something comes up and I want to fire off a pulse about it or whatever it is, or want to deal with something or pick a fight with somebody that I'm in a discussion with, a theological discussion with, I have to fight against my own spirit in it.

Like, what am I actually trying to do here? Am I actually trying to hurt this person? Am I trying to just, is this a prideful action on my part?

Or am I truly loving this person here, loving them by wanting to restore them to faithfulness? Well, and routinely, it's not love that I have primarily in mind.

We need to think about that. So Paul says there's two ways to deal with the confrontation. The first way is that we have to rebuke them sharply. It's necessary. We need to do it. Secondly, he says, gospel instruction is the other part.

[ 28 : 55 ] Gospel instruction. So in verse 14, he reveals two facets of the Cretan heresies. Both had to do with those who converted to Christianity from Judaism.

One referred to myths or speculations that were at least unhelpful, and at most were Gnostic, which would be the idea that a secret knowledge could be attained that would alter your standing before God.

It would come to further development after this time, but there were early notions of it then. The second facet was human traditions, commandments. Part legalism, part asceticism, things that were being encouraged in the church.

The commonality between the heirs is that they both prominently featured the idea that religious ritual, human merit, was essential and part of the core of one's relationship to God.

They didn't deny that Jesus was necessary for salvation. They taught that he alone wasn't sufficient for salvation. That was the difference.

[ 30 : 08 ] They're happy with Jesus. They knew Jesus needed to be a part of it. They just taught that Jesus wasn't all of it. That our human works also determine our standing with God.

And by the way, if we're going to compare this to current belief systems, this is essentially the same exact view of salvation taught in Roman Catholicism. That it's not a denial of Christ, but it's not all Christ.

That it is God's grace and human works would be their language that actually produces salvation and alters a standing before God. That's not a new heresy.

That's a heresy as old as the gospel. If you'll allow me for just a moment, I think this can subtly belong to us at times. At times when maybe in our presentations of the gospel, we don't mean to contradict the fullness of it, but we may inadvertently do it.

Here's what I mean. Sometimes we can treat something like repentance in an explanation of the gospel as if it is a work that is done before Christ will accept us.

[ 31 : 26 ] I was listening to a podcast with Bob Lapine this week and he told a story that he knew about Tim Keller who if you're familiar at all of his writings, you know he pastored in New York City for many years.

He developed this habit of after his sermons on Sundays, he would invite people to come to the front and he would host Q&As; and it would be open. They could ask him whatever question they wanted to ask and he would answer it for a few minutes after the service.

And this invited all kinds of skeptics and doubters in Manhattan to come to these services and they would hear the gospel. It was really quite amazing. I don't think I'm brave enough to do that, but he did it routinely.

One Sunday, there was a lady who had been there for a few weeks and she, I don't know if they used a mic or what, but she said it at least loud enough where others could hear. She said her name and she says, I've been coming to the church now for a few weeks.

Since I'm a lesbian and I live with my lesbian partner, I think that I want to buy into this and I want to join the church. Do I need to leave my partner and abandon this situation before I can be a part of the church?

[ 32 : 39 ] And you can imagine the silence that probably entered the room about that time. They knew what Keller's position on homosexuality was, that it's a sin that must be repented of and that the Lord is not pleased with it.

They knew all of those things. That's why she's asking the question. But his response is actually helpful, I think, helpful in considering the gospel. He says, I think you're asking the wrong question. The question is not what do I have to do before I come to Christ? The question is, is Jesus who he claimed to be, who we've said that he is in the weeks that you've been coming to the church?

And if he is, you need to believe him, trust him, follow him as Lord, and then deal with the implications that come along with that.

In other words, the repentance that Keller was emphasizing in that moment is kind of a sweeping repentance where we are turning from one direction and going in the other way.

[ 33 : 38 ] We're not listing out all the things that we're doing wrong and making sure we clean ourselves up before Jesus will accept us. We're making a sweeping turn towards Christ and then in our faith, acknowledging that we're going to deal with whatever implications come along with that.

Do you see the subtle difference in that? And where we might be tempted, I know I would be tempted, to in that moment say, yeah, abandon your homosexuality and then things will be good. You can come then.

But Jesus doesn't actually tell anybody to do that. The very act of coming to Christ genuinely in faith is to turn away from all the other pursuits of your life, not just your homosexuality, but every other belief system, every other selfish thing that would exalt itself against the knowledge of God.

I'm not pursuing myself anymore. I'm not pursuing my belief systems anymore. I am turning away from all of it in order that I might pursue Christ and then I'm going to deal with the implications so that as the Holy Spirit indwells me and I open up my Bible and I see what the Bible says about this particular thing, I will submit to the leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ in my life because he has redeemed me from these things.

Do you see? The other end of that is the come as you are dynamic where you just come as you are, the implication being that Jesus accepts you no matter where you are and what you are and he's happy to love you and there's no real transformative work that's happening.

[ 35 : 12 ] You don't really have to acknowledge the sinfulness. You just come and receive his love and things are good. Sinclair Ferguson says, Jesus doesn't say come as you are. He says come in spite of who you are.

So we're not cleaning ourselves up before Christ will accept us. Neither are we coming in faith to Christ expecting to remain the same. The gospel is that Jesus has done everything necessary to

forgive our sins that in his perfection he perfectly fulfilled the law that we will never be able to fulfill and he doesn't say do all of these things and clean yourself up and then I'll accept you.

He says no, come to me and I will change you. There's a transformative work of the gospel but that's what he does for us. It's his work in us.

Verse 15 To the pure all things are pure. To the defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure but both their minds and their hearts or their consciences are defiled.

So confronting legalist anesthetics Paul said that those who have been made pure by the righteousness of Christ are no longer made impure by eating certain foods or going through ceremonial cleansings.

[ 36 : 35 ] They are no longer bound by the law. They are under grace. Because these legalists and these ascetics were saying yeah, Jesus is great but you need to be circumcised too.

Jesus is the doorway in but if you want to stay in you're going to have to do all the Jewish things. You're going to have to afflict yourself in a certain way. If you really mean it this is why it's going to happen.

Paul says no. No. To the pure to the one who has been made clean by God all things are now pure. you don't have to worry about the things you're eating.

It's not going to make you unclean. The external things are not what defile us. And then he says believers are no longer under the law because Jesus perfectly fulfilled it.

Therefore all who come to Christ are justified by faith alone apart from any human work. Do you remember in Romans chapter 10 Paul wrote that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

[ 37 : 50 ] Doesn't mean that Jesus was doing away with the law that the law is irrelevant as far as our obedience to God is concerned. But the law has no role in our righteousness.

Christ has brought an end to that because he perfectly fulfilled it. It is by faith that he applies our righteousness to us. His righteousness to us. Paul then reminded the Cretans that no amount of religious observance could make them right with God.

To the defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure. Everything they do is tainted by their sinfulness.

Their minds and their consciences are defiled. Jesus dealt with this.

Remember the Pharisees came to him and they said why don't your disciples follow the traditions of the elders? Why aren't they washing their hands before they eat? And Jesus says what comes out of a person is what defiles him.

For from within out of the heart of a man come evil thoughts and sexual immoralities and theft and murder and he goes on. All these evil things come from within. They defile a person.

[ 38 : 57 ] It's not whether or not your hands are washed whether you're ceremonially clean. It's has God given you a new heart through the work of Jesus Christ and if you haven't got a new heart through the work of Jesus Christ you're defiled and all of your goodness is defiled.

Everything about you is defiled and there's nothing you can do to change it. That's his point here. What's Paul doing? He's giving gospel instruction. He's rebuking the error and then he's teaching the truth.

Titus rebuke the error and then teach the truth. It's not enough just to tell them that they're wrong. You have to teach them the truth that salvation is not earned by what a man does but it is received by faith and what Christ has already done and the cleansing that Jesus provides is full and it's complete.

So he describes the problem. He deals with the problem and then finally and I'll finish I'm sorry.

Let's look at the danger inherent to the problem. The danger of the problem.

Verse 16. They profess to know God but they deny him by their works. They're detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

[ 40 : 19 ] This is the most scathing section here. Earlier Paul seems to encourage rebuke to restore an errant believer but here he suggests that the promoters of the false doctrine are not believers at all.

the reality is that both types of people will inevitably become a problem in the church. You see, that's what makes these false teachers and their doctrines so dangerous.

It always masks itself as a friend of Christ not an enemy. They profess to know God. They say the things that you would expect them to say but the true nature of their hearts will ultimately be revealed in their behavior.

Two things that it reveals itself in. First, their works are revealed in how they respond to the rebuke. If they're being unfaithful to the gospel and somebody takes their Bible and sits down and says, I think you're wrong here.

This is what the gospel says. What do they do with that? Because the Bible teaches that anyone who knows Christ has the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit who enlightens us to his truth and he fashions us into the likeness of Christ.

[ 41 : 38 ] And if I have the Holy Spirit and somebody's taking the sword of the Spirit and they're saying, here's the truth. Look at the truth. The Spirit's gonna do this work in me. I'm gonna turn away from the error in order to pursue the truth.

That's a work. That's a fruitfulness of the life that Christ is now doing in me of the sanctification he's doing in me. He says, so watch how they respond to the rebuke.

But then there's a second part to this. Remember, belief always affects behavior. Paul says, their behavior is detestable.

It's disobedient. It's unfit for any good work. Jesus says, you'll know them by the fruitfulness of their lives. Does their fruit match their profession?

Beware of false prophets, Jesus said, who come to you in sheep's clothing. You'll recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?

[ 42 : 37 ] So every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. We'll recognize them by their fruits. Commitment to the gospel will always result in godliness.

Always. Progressive? Yes. But it will always progress forward. Distortion of the gospel will always result in a life characterized by unrepentant sin.

The individuals are dangerous because they're so deceptive. Their doctrines are dangerous because they lead you on a path of sin and unbelief rather than faith and godliness.

Now step back and consider the big picture of the book now. What's Paul driving at in this letter?

You need healthy structures that emphasize the gospel because belief affects behavior.

And as the gospel is preserved, it will produce godliness in God's people. But if you start to let error in, you're going to see a change in the way that God's people live.

[ 43 : 45 ] They may say the right things, but what's the fruitfulness of their lives? Are they content to live in sin? Are they content to be disobedient to the Lord? The Cretan problem has been and will be a problem for every church and every age.

That's why it's crucial for churches to encourage and appoint faithful elders. They'll be committed to the gospel.

They'll be products of godliness, producing godliness in their teaching. They will rebuke promoters of error. They will rebuke promoters of error.