

How To Handle Poison

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[0 : 00] Please turn in your Bibles to Titus chapter 1, preaching through the book of Titus. As you turn there, I want to share with you a story that I read in a book called Fighting Satan by Joel Beakey.

It's a story of a farmer who had a large crop of watermelons, but he suspected that there was a thief breaking onto his property and stealing his watermelons in the middle of the night. So the farmer got clever, and he put a sign out in the field, and it said, One watermelon is poisoned.

Hoping this would keep those thieves away, he was really sad to see when they had snuck with a can of spray paint and changed his sign so that now it reads, Two watermelons are poisoned.

You see, Satan wants to twist God's words in the same way. And if Satan can't pluck away and steal from the church and from God's kingdom, then he wants to try to ruin and poison the church for the whole, ruin the whole crop.

If you can't have your way, it's how Satan works. So what we have in the book of Titus is really Paul as a general in the King Jesus' army, and he's up on the chalkboard.

[1 : 10] He's showing us the game film. This is how the enemy attacks the church. We need to study how Satan moves, and he needs to equip the church to handle that.

So church, here is your marching orders for the battlefield. The promise is that the kingdom of Christ will prevail. Don't be deceived by Satan's tactics. Those same tricks that he uses today, he's used all along.

And here's how you handle it. Titus chapter 1, verses 10 through 16. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths, in the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

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. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.

[2 : 36] They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. This is the word of God. Well, the doctrine we see Paul teaching is this.

Your life and religion are poisoned until you know Christ through God's law and gospel. Your life and religion are poisoned until you know Christ through God's law and gospel.

So the title for today's message is this, how to handle poison. I want to say a quick word about poison in the church. It might sound surprising.

And then I'll break this text into two parts. Number one, how poison spreads. Number two, how poison must be handled. So a brief word about poison in the church.

Then how poison spreads within the church. And finally, how poison must be handled in the church. Poison in the church? Sounds surprising.

- [3 : 38] But Christ warns the church of wolves in sheep's clothing. There are those among you who are going to look like they belong in the church. We're going to act that way.
- But it's an act. Those sheep have some sharp fangs. Beware. So here are two truths that we have in the Bible about poison in the church. Number one, the church will never be perfect on this side of heaven.
- Don't expect that. There will always be a mix of believers, true believers, with a new heart who love Jesus Christ. And among those, even those that might be members, those who really hate Christ and who are acting as sheep.
- Only God knows who are the elect. Only the Father can discern the intentions of man's heart. So there will never be perfect harmony and perfect purity inside a physical church on this side of heaven.
- We can accept that from Scripture and we're warned of it. But here's the second truth. Nonetheless, the church must still labor to present herself pure to Christ. So it's intention here.
- [4 : 48] It will never be perfectly pure for Christ on this side of heaven. But nonetheless, the job of the church is to labor and present herself pure to Christ.
- Both are important. See, Christ has given the church the keys to his kingdom. And the kingdom of God, it's over all the earth, but it's in a special concentrated way within his church.
- Because the church is the spiritual kingdom of God. It's the kingdom of heaven where Christ rules and reigns fully carried out in the lives of his people. So yes, in this body, in this flesh, on this earth, we will still struggle against sin and battle to our last breath.
- However, Christ reigns over the church, and therefore we must do our best as a church to grow in sanctification, and for the elders of a church to use those keys of the kingdom.
- And admitting to the church membership to be considered among the church, the standard must be moving toward purity. Not expecting every member's life to be totally settled out, but Christ as the Lord of your life.
- [5 : 55] And that's what we call a credible profession. When a person professes to love the Lord and to be under his authority in their life, we can count that as credible. That's who will be baptized.
- And that's who will belong to the family of God, to a local congregation. So through baptism and the Lord's Supper could be another way that the keys of the kingdom are used.
- We want to show that those who Christ has entrusted to our care are in right standing with the Lord and with this body. There will be conflict. There will be sin. And we minister God's grace to one another in those moments.
- Jesus Christ said to his disciples, And that's what we must labor for.
- The church must labor to present herself pure to Christ as stewards of his kingdom. All right. So here in this text, we have this charge. Titus feels it. And Paul is going to tell him now how poison spreads in a church.
- [7 : 00] How does poison spread? This is our first heading. Well, it spreads in two ways. First, when these liars, or Paul calls them self-deceivers, when they're allowed a platform to teach.
- So when liars are allowed a platform. And then the second way is poison spreads when false teaching and sinful lifestyles are not countered with God's truth.
- So poison spreads when those who teach false lies are allowed to do it. And number two, when their lives and their false teaching is not countered by God's truth. Look at verse 10.

This is how poison spreads. Verse 10. They're allowed a platform and they become insubordinate. So they're attacking Titus, accusing him of being illegitimate and not having spiritual authority. So they're being rebellious.

Verse 10. They're empty talkers. Yes, they have a platform, but there's no substance that points back to God. There's no gospel message in the words they say. Number 10 as well.

[7 : 58] They are deceivers. And all they offer is an outward religion. They're the circumcision party. So they're trying to impose on the church covenant sanctions and a covenant sign that have no bearing over the people of God.

If you are saved, it doesn't matter what background you come from. It doesn't matter how much sin you previously have committed and have in your life. It doesn't matter the baggage you have from your families or what denomination you might have moved out of or what other religion you might have been following.

That's not what holds claim to your life. You are a child of God now, and you are under the covenant of Jesus Christ, the covenant of grace, which he brought into effect with a new covenant.

You're no longer under these outward religions. And we're called here. Paul calls these deceivers. He calls them those who are upsetting entire families and who act for shameful gain.

So really, these are masters at coming in, offering something that will entice even true Christians, luring them away just to do a bait and switch.

[9 : 08] And with these empty words, their words are not here to point glory to God. Their words are really trying to get more power for themselves. And the true Christians that have the spirit of God in them, they will know the difference.

They will know if they're being starved and if there is this false teaching that's causing them now to lack confidence in God's word and confidence in their unity with the body of God under God's word.

Because it's become about man. It's become about loyalty to a person over following King Jesus as Lord of all. It was both their teaching and their lifestyles here that are being addressed.

It's most likely two different groups, both of which Paul is lumping together. And the way to address them is the same. On one hand, you have a group of people trying to impose a man-centered religion.

On the other side, you have another group that's trying to say, you are not under any law. You can live however you like. You don't need to reform your life to the gospel. And for that second group, those who are licentious and feel like they are above any law from God, they are probably native of Crete and they have this reputation that they are living out very well.

[10 : 19] It was Epitomes, ancient Greek philosopher 600 years before Christ, who Paul is quoting here. And Paul shows he's educated and he's a student of the culture.

And it's his job now to take the one gospel of Jesus Christ, but explain it and to cut through the root problems with this culture. See, in Crete, they had a reputation of seeing no obstacle for greedy gain.

That's how Cicero explained it. Cretans, they see no obstacle for gain. For example, if you travel to Crete and you're traveling along the coast, beautiful Cretan Island paradise area, and you might just get jumped and robbed because in Crete, the reputation was they saw even a roadside robbery like that, just flat out robbing you of everything you have as a noble thing.

You know, good for them. Good for those teenagers. They were able to just mug that old man and take his belongings. And it might be easy for us to sit here and look back at Crete as being a barbarian state.

But listen to how James says in James chapter 3. He says this is exactly our heart as well. We are no better than those Cretans. James wrote, See how it's the tongue that carries the poison.

[11 : 42] With it, we bless our Lord and Father. And with it, we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. That's a similar charge that Paul is warning of here, isn't it? They profess to know God, but look at how they live.

They are cutting and spreading poison at every turn, every time they open their mouth. Verse 10 in chapter 3 of James, From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.

And certainly not in the church of God. But we're no better today. We could call this cultural Christianity or country music Christians. You could be sincere and have sincere feelings and still be wrong.

Listen to this country song by Joe Diffie. Prop me up beside the jukebox if I die, Lord. I want to go to heaven, but I don't want to go tonight.

Fill my boots up with sand. Put a stiff drink in my hand. Prop me up before the jukebox if I die. Do you catch that? I want to go to heaven, but I don't want to go tonight.

[12 : 50] Man, isn't that a picture of our culture? You know, I'm not saying God's not real. I'm not saying Jesus and the gospel is not for me. I just want to live it up right now in this world.

So from that same mouth comes this licentious lifestyle, and yet trying to earn some kind of points for acknowledging God and a future eternal destination for the soul.

Listen to 1 Peter 1. Caution. Believers in God are raised from the dead, and he gave them glory so that your faith and hope are in God.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart. See the contrast between that licentious lifestyle and the purity, the true purity that is for the church.

Peter writes, Since you have been born again, you were dead, you are now raised from the dead with Christ. You are born again. You have a new spiritual life.

[13 : 56] He writes, Not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. That's what the church is. The church is a group of sinners who have been saved.

Christ has pronounced them to be saints, and they're on a pilgrimage, and they are guided by the word of truth from the word of God. Well, the second way that poison spreads is when false teaching is sinful, and those sinful lifestyles are not countered with God's truth.

Paul says to Titus, Call them out. Call it what it is. This cannot keep going on in the church. We know this very well. What are they? Well, according to Paul, sees no reason to hold a punch.

He confirms, These are evil beasts. They're no better than the animals. They're running after their cravings and fleshly desires. Evil beasts, verse 12.

Lazy gluttons, verse 12. They prefer the commands of men, verse 13. That's a key verse. They prefer, Not the word of God, revealed from God, spoken and protected and preserved in his word, the Bible, and proclaimed from the pulpit in biblical churches.

[15 : 11] No. They prefer the empty talk of men. Verse 14. Look at the effect. They turn others away from the truth. They are defiled, defiled, poisoned in their mind and their conscience.

Verse 15. What a miserable state. They profess to know God. Why? Well, they're baiting and switching. They are deceiving those who are weak in the faith. Verse 15. They deny him by their works.

They are false professors. Verse 16. They are detestable, disobedient, and in contrast to the qualified labor, that is fit to do any good work for the Lord.

These are unfit for any good work. Verse 16. And poison is spreading within these churches in Crete. Titus is charged. It's applying the old wisdom from Proverbs 22.

Drive out a scoffer and strife will go out, and quarreling and abuse will cease. Titus is being abused. There's quarreling, division among the homes in their churches.

[16 : 14] Drive out the scoffer, the one who thinks they're above God's word, who mocks the faithful preaching of God's word. Drive them out, and you'll find peace, which you need.

But here's the caution. Titus, are you going to take this on? You know Timothy. He's taking punches. Are you going to do it? Be ready. Proverbs 9, 7 warns of this as well.

Whoever does correct a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. So, church, are you going to walk in the way of Christ, even in your own members?

Christ went to battle against evil. Satan is the ultimate scoffer, and Christ took him on. But just know, when you do that, that abuse will be ended for the congregation.

You will do the right thing, but you will be taking it on for yourself. Just like Christ took the attacks and the mocks and the wickedness of Satan, he took it on his own body to protect his bride.

[17 : 16] That's what you need to do now. In the name of Christ, for the protection of his bride, will you do it? Poison must be handled.

You see how it spreads. Now, Paul wants to make sure you will handle it. And here's how you do it. Paul teaches. Number one, he says you must silence the evil.

You must remove this pattern. Look at verse 11. Remove their platform. Steal away from them their thunder. Do not permit them to teach or preach or leave the Bible study.

And if it comes to it after attempts at restoring them, do not allow them to share in the Lord's table. Do not allow that. You have the keys of the kingdom. So remove their platform.

Verse 11. Look at verse 12. They must be rebuked sharply. Silence them. Don't let them talk and then rebuke them sharply. Speak the truth. Verse 12.

[18 : 14] Address the lie that they are spewing head on. Bring the weight of scripture to bear on it. Shine the light of Christ on that darkness so the whole congregation can see Christ does not abandon you to this false teaching.

Hebrews 12.10 says, Our earthly fathers disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them. But Christ disciplines us for our good.

Christ never gets it wrong. And why does he do that? That we may share in his holiness. The author of Hebrews goes on. He says, For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Therefore, church, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees and make straight paths for your feet so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

See, when you obey God, Hebrews 12 says, Obey him. Make straight. He makes straight those paths for you. Your feet will not stumble. So he strengthens your weak knees.

[19 : 26] He gives you the courage to handle conflict in a biblical way that restores God's people to Christ. Verse 14. He says, See, when you correct a person who is causing division or spewing these lies that undermine God's word, you're really doing it out of love for them that they may know God's grace ultimately.

They need to be corrected, need to repent of their sin, and run back to Christ at the cross for forgiveness. And then they should be restored. And there should be no root of bitterness that springs up and causes trouble in the church.

Because through unforgiven sin, whenever sin is not addressed, confronted, repented of, and it just continues to fester, many become defiled.

It spreads like an infection in the body or like poison in the system. The church must handle false teaching and sinful lifestyles in a biblical way.

Well, biblical church discipline, to neglect the wrong teaching and the wrong lifestyle that are not reformed in accordance to God's word is sin. It is motivated in a biblical way.

[20 : 52] When you see that, you always will be doing it out of love, seeking to restore. So discipline will always be a tool of sanctification. It's something that's going to purify us and make us more ready for Christ.

Church discipline requires courage. It will prevent you from stumbling, and it should always lead to healing. Peace requires striving and hard work.

Isn't that true with parenting? That's where the author of Hebrews in chapter 12 goes, isn't it? You know, even within a home, your children, they will need you to guide them. They will need you to correct them when they're wrong.

And it's going to be hard work. Parenting is hard work. Laboring for peace in the church based on truth is hard work. Seeing God will require holiness.

No one will see God without the purity of heart that he calls for. No one will see him. It will be hard work to grow in sanctification. Overseers, these shepherds, these elders, and every single member, they are to be striving for every other person in their congregation to obtain God's grace.

[22 : 04] That's what we labor for. Verse 13, you do all of this, Paul tells Titus, so that true believers will become sound in the faith.

So think about it. What matters most then? If poison is so dangerous, and we can err on both sides, man-made religion or man-pleasing sin, what matters most?

Well, he says, don't fall for that outward religion. Instead, verse 15, you want to present the church to be sound in the faith, in the truth, which produces a pure bride for Christ.

Christ is interested in the heart. To the pure, all things are pure. It doesn't matter what these false teachers are saying or accusing you of, Titus. You keep a clear conscience before God.

Know that if you're pure in Christ, they can accuse you of anything, but to the pure in Christ, all things Christ will count as pure. By contrast, though, is the warning, church.

[23 : 09] Your life and religion are poisoned until you know Christ. Through God's law, there's no room for licentiousness and his gospel. There's no room for man-made legalism.

You can discern poison by the words, the energy, and the passion that it's pointing to. Think about this. If you've been in churches or been in other groups, you can tell everything that they're about, it's pointing back to man, isn't it?

It exists for man. That's poison. When there's conflict, if all the grounds of argument are for man's power, it's poison. We want to be about God.

A biblical church, the words, the energy, the passion, even how conflict is handled, it's not about the power of man. It's about bringing glory to God. That's when you know you're in a group that's seeking to be more and more reformed to the Bible for the glory of God.

So really, we could call both sides, both eras there, man, you know, man, it's man-centered, cultural Christianity. Whether it's legalism, on one hand, or licentiousness, it's really for man in both cases.

[24 : 20] In both cases, it's not true Christianity. It's cultural Christianity. And you could say it's Satan's same poison in a green box or a red box. You pick your box.

It's the same poison. Both are defiled and unbelieving, verse 15. Man-centered legalism, those of the circumcision party, verses 10 and 13, they're focused on man and their power as men and they're trying to impose man-made laws on the church.

The other poison is the man-centered licentiousness. Like verse 12, these are evil beasts and lazy gluttons. They're living it up for this age rather than the age to come.

Paul's telling Titus, within my church, Christ's church, the biblical church, no amount of poison is to be tolerated. Poison, like Christ said, it's like leaven or yeast.

A littlest bit will work its way through the whole body, the whole dough. The whole church will be poisoned if it's not handled well. You may be thinking, I don't know.

[25 : 27] I don't know if I belong in church at all. I don't want to be bringing poison in. I've been in places where I've felt that. It's all about man. I did not feel like the real church. And I don't want to be spreading poison.

What do I do? Well, the Bible teaches you're either under Adam or you're under Christ. If you're under Adam, your focus is going to be on man.

Your works, your awareness of your fall trying to climb back up to God, you're going to feel the misery of being under the curse. You're not going to enjoy that peace of knowing the work of Christ for you.

You will be in darkness. that total depravity, everything to the impure. Nothing is pure. The poison is spread everywhere. Every thought and intention and inclination of man's heart is totally wicked, evil, always, continually.

And you'll know that guilt that sets in from the curse of Adam. You want to get out from under that. And if Christ is stirring this in your heart, it's to draw you to the cross for your salvation.

[26 : 37] And at the cross is where you discover the wonderful promise that you will be justified. You will be made right with God through Christ. You'll be given a heart that God will count as pure.

That's what Paul's reminding Titus. Keep proclaiming the gospel. The church needs to be sound in the faith. Verse 13. Be sound in the faith, church. Hold on to that gospel promise.

Romans 3, verses 25 and 26. We know propitiation, the payment of sin by Christ himself with his blood to be received by faith.

You do not earn Christ's blood that forgives your sins. This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins.

It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

[27 : 42] If you're under Christ by faith, you know that Christ fully satisfied God's law for you. He suffered the punishment that your sin deserves, the death that you ought to die.

And he gave you the gift of eternal life that he earned as a gracious gift to you. And now your life is really one of gratitude. You live in response to his powerful work for you and inside you.

And that's how you get to experience Matthew 5, 18. Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

That's how you can know the purity of the gospel. You can be free from man's legalism and you can be free from the bondage of sin and slavery to death under Satan.

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. If you know what it is to be washed by the blood of the Lamb, to be given a heart that's now pure, and to see God through the face of Christ, you gratefully receive all of God's law, the moral law of God that is for every generation, for all of his image bearers.

[29 : 03] You receive that from the hand of Christ and you obey him out of a response of gratitude. And it brings you peace. And that's the peace of the church when we know the gospel of Christ.

May this be our prayer from Psalm 51, verses 10 through 14. Psalm 51. Create in me a clean heart, a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence. You can see God's face and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit.

Give me Christ's strength, Lord, by your Holy Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will return to you.

Cause my brokenness, Father, as a sinner that you have saved to bear witness of your goodness so that others may know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

[30 : 15] And so that God alone may receive all the glory. And his church may enjoy his peace until you bring us all the way to glory with our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.