

Titus 1: 1-16 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, 2 in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began³ and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour; 4 To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— 6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. 7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, 8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 9 **He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.**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.

The Bible's picture of a church leader (an elder or pastor) is the shepherd. In today's world of corporate business, we would not naturally think of shepherds as leaders, but we need to come back to this biblical picture for two reasons that relate to the good of both the leaders and the church.

Most of us will have some idea of what shepherds do – they care for their flock by feeding and protecting them in various ways. Elders are to instruct believers and rebuke false teachers (**v9**) and in this way

Elders will feed and protect the church.

Elders will also pray, keep watch over their own lives, study, organise, and visit. However, prayer is to be the major part of what they do, and undergird everything. Prayer, study and visiting serve the twofold task of

- 1) Feeding the church** on the truth that God speaks
- 2) Protecting the church** from the lies of false teachers by rebuking and silencing them.

Elders are to shepherd the church

How are elders to do the shepherding? They are to lead the church into godliness, so character is vital. If elders are:

- Lying and deceitful, they won't be able to call the church to speak truthfully and rebuke those who lie
- Living sexually immoral lives, they won't be able to call the church to sexual purity, and rebuke those who are living sexually immoral lives
- Greedy for financial gain or status, the church will become a place where greed and bullying exist, and the elders will have no right to challenge that culture

Character comes before gifting

Elders need to set an example to the church, but they also need to ensure that what Jesus commanded through the apostles is taught to the church.

- 1. Feeding the church - Elders are to instruct believers (v9).**

Our elders are to instruct the church in sound doctrine. Doctrine is the set of beliefs that the church holds to and practices. It is the truth about God and how we are to relate to him and is relevant for all people. Elders are to teach:

- a) **Who God is and what God has done** - for example: God is both loving and just therefore ...

- His justice demands that sinners be punished, and as all sin against him is eternal, so the punishment for sin is eternal death.
- God's love, however, drives him to rescue sinners from this eternal death. He sets his love on people and chooses not to hold their sin against them. Instead, he chooses to forgive and adopt them into his family.
- The only way he can do that is by satisfying his own justice himself which he did through coming himself to die the eternal death our sins deserve.

The death of Jesus was God loving his people and satisfying his own justice
so that sinners could be put right with God.

b) What we are to do in response to who God is and what God has done – for example:

- God requires us to stop trying to make ourselves good enough for him to accept us
- We are to put our trust in Jesus alone to make us right with God and to stop our rebellion against him

Doctrine must be taught, but it must be the right doctrine (**sound doctrine v9**). Paul uses a word from medicine to show that what the elders teach and what the church believes needs to be healthy. If we feed our souls on doctrine that is unhealthy, then our lives will be unhealthy like those of the people of Crete, when Titus was there.

Where does healthy doctrine come from? Paul says elders must '**hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught' (v9)**

The trustworthy word is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that the apostles of Jesus taught and preserved in writing for us. It is the Bible, where we discover the truth about God, who he is and what he has done, and how we are to respond.

This alone is the book on which we build our doctrine.

This word is trustworthy because it comes from God, who never lies (v2).

2. Protecting the church - Elders are to rebuke false teachers (v9)

The church in every age has had false teachers, both inside and outside. They contradict the message that Jesus has given through the apostles, saying things that may appear to be from the Bible but actually contradict the gospel.

Elders must deal with them by identifying, exposing and silencing them, and Paul shows how to do this in **vv10-11**.

False teachers can be identified by looking at:

- i. **How they relate to authority** – they are insubordinate (**v10**), and will not submit to the authority of the apostolic message to the church, which comes from Jesus. If someone comes to the church and starts twisting the message of the Bible to say something that it doesn't say, they are a false teacher.
- ii. **What they say about salvation** – in Paul's day some Jewish Christian believers taught that to be saved required faith in Jesus **and** circumcision (**v10**). These people were teaching a different message of salvation to the one Jesus had given Paul. If someone tells you that, to be saved, you need to confess your sin to a priest and pay penance, they are a false teacher because Jesus doesn't require that. Equally if anyone says that trusting in Jesus will make you healthy and wealthy, this is false teaching because Jesus did not say that.
- iii. **The results of their teaching** – whole families were being upset (**v11**) and so were not living as Jesus wanted them to live, as we saw last week. If the teaching of elders is encouraging a life that doesn't mirror the life of Jesus, then they are false teachers.
- iv. **What motivates them** – the false teachers in Crete were motivated by money (**shameful gain v11**). If teachers just want to get wealth or status, or to satisfy pride, and their motivation isn't the glory of God and the good of God's people, then they are false teachers.

These false teachers must be exposed, as Paul does here. Though he doesn't name them, it is clear who he has in mind, and Titus and the elders need to know who they must silence (**v11**). The word Paul uses means to gag. In the 21st century, silencing false teachers is more of a problem. Although it is relatively easy to silence them in our church, it is not possible for the elders to prevent access to them on TV, YouTube and other media platforms in your homes. Yet what they are teaching is wrong, and it will turn your life upside down if you follow them. How can shepherds of God's people silence false teachers in an age when they are so accessible?

a) Motivation to silence false teachers

In **Titus ch1**, Paul shows us two voices we could follow – the voice of God (**vv1-3**) or that of false teachers (**v10**).

- Through Paul, the voice of God speaks words of truth that can be trusted, because God never lies
- The voices of the false teachers speak only lies because they are deceivers.
- The voice of God makes promises that can be trusted.
- The false teachers are empty talkers and what they say cannot be trusted.

The voice of God leads to eternal life (v2) but the voice of the false teachers will lead to eternal death.

Who are you going to believe?

Our eternal life depends on who we listen to and what we believe, and that is the motive to identify, expose and silence false teachers.

b) There are two things needed to silence false teachers.

i. Shepherds who protect. These shepherds will:

- give themselves to study the Bible, and hold firmly to it, knowing it, believing it and living it so that they can feed God's people by teaching sound doctrine that leads to lives that reflect Jesus and to eternal life
- study contemporary culture so they can teach sound doctrine that connects with, exposes and challenges it
- give themselves time to study and read deeply and widely, and will be given that time by the church
- know that they themselves are sheep who are dependent on Jesus the great shepherd.

Christ feeds them so they can feed the church, and he protects them so they can protect the church.

Jesus is the chief shepherd who works through his under-shepherds for the sake of the church.

ii. A congregation who pray for and use discernment. They must test whether the teaching they hear:

- comes from a person who submits to the teaching of the apostles, whose character meets the qualifications in **vv6-8**, and whose lifestyle reflects the life that Jesus lived on earth.
- exalts Christ alone as Saviour, teaching the truth about Jesus and what he came to do
- promotes holy living, leading people to live more like Jesus and less like the world
- comes from a person who loves Christ, Christ's word and Christ's people, the church

If the answer to any of that is no, then switch off the TV, video or podcast you are listening to, burn the book you're reading, and don't go to the conference you've booked into.

- Do everything you can to silence that voice that is leading you away from Jesus and into eternal death.
- Do everything you can to hear the voice of God and the voice of the chief shepherd, Jesus Christ, who will lead you into a righteous life and on into eternal life.

Now may Christ who is adored in highest heaven, the everlasting Lord, the Prince and Sun of righteousness, fill us with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Amen.