

The Silencing of the Wolves

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[0 : 00] Well, we turn now to God's Word, and so if you'll take your Bibles and open them at Paul's letter to Titus, that's page 998, if you have one of our church visitors' Bibles.

We're looking at the second half this evening of chapter 1, but I'll read just from the beginning of chapter 1, so that we get the flow. Titus 1 at verse 1, 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, in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his Word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.

To Titus, my true child, in a common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained to order and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.

If anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and his children, our believers are not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination, for an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach.

He mustn't be arrogant or quick-tempered or drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

[1 : 44] He must hold firmly 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.

For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced since they are upsetting whole families or whole households 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. Therefore, rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who are turning 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. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

[3 : 04] Amen. May God bless to us this His word. And a solemn word it is. Good.

Or please do you have Titus, chapter 1 open there in front of you, page 998. And we're looking particularly at verses 10 to 16 there of chapter 1.

Now, I can't think of many people that enjoy conflict. In fact, most of us go out of our way to avoid it. If you're anything like me, that's the case.

You just duck it when you can. But some people, some rather strange people, enjoy a good fight, a good argument. One of my younger brothers is a bit like that.

He would happily argue with an inanimate object if the opportunity arose. He has the tendency to be a bit annoying at times. But I imagine that most of us, most of the time, enjoy the quiet life away from controversy.

[4 : 18] And especially so when it comes to church. We sometimes think that conflict has no place in the church. Something must be wrong if there's conflict in the church.

Surely, it's not very Christian, we think. Somebody misbehaves. We just sweep it under the carpet. Somebody speaks untruth.

Let's just forget the bit we didn't like and remember the rest. He was such a nice man. He meant no harm, surely. Let's not take issue with that blatant false teaching.

It would just cause division and upset. We'll just accommodate. We're a broad church, after all. Paul takes aim at that sort of thinking in this passage.

Not that he's wanting Titus to enjoy conflict, but rather that he wasn't to shirk it. And he was to appoint men that weren't to shirk conflict when necessary.

[5 : 20] Not that we, as a church, are to be seeking it out. Suspecting every preacher who comes along, who doesn't sign up to every dot and iota of the Westminster Confession.

But rather, we are not to duck conflict when the very truth of the gospel, when the witness of the church is at stake. We're not to duck conflict then.

Paul says what he says here, and it's sobering, isn't it? He says it because it is the truth that is at stake. The health of the church is at stake.

Issues of eternity and salvation are at stake. That is why Paul says what he says. Paul's big concern in the letter is that Titus would insist on the teaching of the truth on Crete and insist on its implications in terms of how people were to live.

The truth that leads to godliness. Titus' big task, therefore, was to appoint the sort of men that would teach truth and contradict error.

[6 : 32] Affirmation of truth involves, necessarily, contradiction of error. error. And our verses today show why the willingness to do that, why the willingness to stand up to error was a key criteria for the men Titus was to appoint.

Our passage shows us that the Cretan church was shot through with untrue teaching. Let me read again from verse 9.

The sort of men that Titus is to appoint must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught so that he may be able to give instruction and sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

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

Why does Paul insist on teachers in the mold of chapter 1 verse 9? Because teachers in the mold of chapter 1 verse 10 exist and there are plenty of them too for there are many who are insubordinate, many empty talkers, many deceivers.

[7 : 57] This was a major problem on Crete. deceitful teachers were in and amongst the young church there and they were as we'll see destroying the church.

These men verse 16 they profess to know God but they deny him by their works. It's a big problem for a young vulnerable church and the solution was good teachers.

teachers who had the authority to insist on truth and rebuke error. Now our task today is a less pleasant one than last week.

We considered last time the traits and the tasks of the good teacher, the sort of men that we are to look out for and encourage into teaching and leading roles in the church.

This week it's the flip side of the coin. we're considering the deceitful teachers wolves as Paul calls them in other letters wolves in and amongst the flock.

[9 : 06] What marks them out as dangerous? What impact are they actually having? Are they really that dangerous? What is to be done? Well first then the marks of these teachers deceitful teachers deny God through their deceitful lips and disobedient lives.

Just notice again Paul's description of these men in verse 10. There are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers, deceivers. These people do not submit to authority.

They do as they please. And the reality is their words are utterly deceptive and empty of truth. Despite their professing to know God, verse 16, they deny him by their works.

But what is the nature of their teaching? Well it seems to be that some from the circumcision party who are at the front of Paul's thinking here, verse 10, they teach religion, they teach culturally acceptable truths.

Look at verse 14, Jewish myths, the commands of people who turn away from the truth. The Cretan character and culture, lies, laziness, selfishness had clearly infused the Cretan church.

[10 : 35] It had affected and altered the teaching. Rather than assist on truth, certain people in the church were teaching a distorted gospel. The commands of men, rather than the truth of the God who never lies.

Perhaps they teach what they teach in the hope that they might become more acceptable to the culture around. And so the church was becoming indistinguishable from the world around it.

The world, Crete, had invaded the church. The proper ordering of things had been flipped on its head. Surely it's to be the other way around. The church is to be invading the world, challenging its ideas and assumptions, calling people to the obedience of faith.

Perhaps we think of areas where cultural norms from the world start to become part and parcel of the church, its life, its teaching.

It's difficult to think about that, isn't it? Because it's just the air that we breathe as we live in the world day to day. but perhaps it's an avoidance of speaking truth, of making truth claims.

[11 : 52] Dare we offend somebody? The secular gospel of tolerance. Does that creep in? Perhaps it's the sense of entitlement. We expect things to be done for us.

We're the consumer. We have rights. Church is there to meet my needs. It had better not make demands of me. Those ideas that we just absorb from the world around us, they must be challenged.

A church that looks and sounds just like the world isn't going to be adorning the gospel. It's not going to be holding firm to the truth. These false teachers that Paul tackles, that encourages Titus to tackle, they proclaimed a message that slotted in nicely with the prevailing attitudes in the society around them.

And they also seem to add a dollop of inoffensive religion to the mix. They push for new Christians to be circumcised. They undermine the very gospel they've been taught and they replace it with stuff to do.

And that sort of thing has real gravity to it, doesn't it? We're naturally attracted to stuff that has the appearance of religion. mere church attendance at church every Sunday without fail and yet not seeking to serve and build up Christians in any other way.

[13 : 23] Buying and talking about the right sorts of Christian books just to impress. Superficial things that we can do that have the appearance of godliness that gives us a sense of progress in religion but really it's just a case of us being one up on the Joneses.

Stuff that we can quite easily tick off and do and complete. Stuff that falls a long way short of the wholehearted total good living that Paul expected to see in the Christian church there on Crete.

In a culture that finds it very difficult to hear the Christian message it's easy to dress it up in religion. A temptation to reverse the good works equation.

As this letter so clearly sets out good works are the outflowing of living faith. It's God's truth that leads to godliness in the life of the believer.

It is only because of the grace of God that has appeared bringing salvation to all that we are trained to lead godly lives. It is only through the gospel that we find favor in God's sight.

[14 : 38] Our good works contribute nothing to our standing before him. They're just a natural outworking as we respond to his grace. But these false teachers seek to reverse that equation.

Here are some things you can do. Religion, Jewish myths, the commands of men, a few good works that will earn you a few brownie points with your fellow man, a few nice rituals to experience, a focus on social action to the exclusion of communication of the gospel, a desire to be well thought of and inoffensive, to be considered tolerant.

A good dose of religion will get you that, but that is fundamentally deceitful. It falls short of sound instruction in God's word.

It's horribly deceitful because it promises all the blessings and benefits of the real thing. It promises favor with God, eternal life, but it cruelly sells you short.

the reality is that these deceitful teachers, as they speak of man-made religion, they actually distance themselves and their hearers from God.

[15 : 58] they teach damaged doctrine. It's not the truth. They are deceitful teachers and they live disobedient lives.

They profess to know God, but in reality, they deny him by their works. See, true knowledge of God is indistinguishable, inseparable from godly living, says Paul.

They come together. And these guys that he's urging Titus to tackle, they show that they don't know God at all through the way they're living.

Perhaps you suspect a teacher is not perhaps the real deal. Look at his life. Look beyond the smooth words.

Does he affirm what the Bible says one minute and the next, undermine it by his actions or turn a blind eye to obvious and blatant disobedience in the life of the church? Such a man is a deceitful teacher who separates what they say and how they live.

[17 : 18] As Paul puts it in other letters, such men are wolves. They're out to feed themselves, boost their egos, satisfy their lusts.

End of verse 11, teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. They're in it for themselves. But we are to look beyond the words.

Look at the man. Look at his life. Look at their works. That's the test, and that's a hard-hitting word, isn't it?

I tremble as I say it. As I say this, I invite you to look at my life, my works, my deeds. These deceitful teachers, these people who deny God, their teaching is deceitful, and their lives are full of disobedience.

Deceitful teachers deny God through their deceitful lips, disobedience, disobedience, disobedience, disobedience, disobedience, disobedience, disobedience, but what about the impact that such men are having?

[18 : 31] They exist. But what real danger do they possess? What real danger do they pose? Well, Paul could not be clearer.

Deceitful teachers destroy the church. Deceitful teachers destroy the church. The stakes are that high. Really understanding what is in play gives real motivation to tackle the deceitful teachers.

Paul says in verse 11 that these empty talkers, these deceivers, they must be silent since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

And when Paul makes reference to families here, the word is households. And in this context, I think it probably means household churches are being torn apart, being upset.

Paul's focus in the past was almost always on the household of God, the church. And these deceitful teachers are upsetting whole household churches, not just odd individuals, but whole gatherings of God's people.

[19 : 44] people. We perhaps don't feel the force of the upsetting language here, but it must surely be significant distress and turmoil.

Churches being torn apart. It must be that serious, mustn't it, for Paul to speak in such strong terms through the whole paragraph. You can sense the agony that must have been tearing Paul apart as he wrote this.

A young, vulnerable church on the island of Crete that he established. A church that he himself was not able to finish the job with. That's why Titus is there.

He's there to carry on the work that Paul started. You can just imagine Paul worrying about the church under attack from these deceitful, disobedient, detestable teachers.

They're destroying the church. You see, damaged doctrine damages people. It's not harmless.

[20 : 48] It does things. Damaged doctrine is not harmless. Paul knew that, and he knew that it was very serious indeed. The church, the household of God, the body through which God makes known to the entire cosmos his manifold wisdom, the church that proclaims to the universe God's great plan for everything is being damaged.

And destroyed by deceitful teachers. And if we fail to see the significance of the church in God's plan, then we'll not see the real danger that is posed by such people.

Do you see how precious the church is in the sight of God, in the sight of Paul? Each little household church on Crete, each church here in this city, each church that holds the apostolic gospel, each one is precious in the sight of God.

And for empty talkers to come in and upset the church, well, that is very serious indeed. It is no small thing to upset the household of God.

How dare they? we perhaps see now why Paul uses such colorful language in verse 16. Perhaps we cringed slightly when that was read out earlier.

[22 : 17] A little strong, don't you think, Paul? Need to turn it down a bit? Well, not at all. The church is at stake. You and I need to see the real impact that empty talkers like this have.

Men whose lives deny their lips. Men who peddle religion rather than the gospel proclaimed by Paul. Men whose teaching does not produce godliness but the opposite.

And so you and I ought to pray for protection against such people. Pray for your church leader, your church leaders, that they might be alert to deceitful teachers such as this.

Pray that they would see them for what they are. Pray that they would have the courage to do what is necessary. And that begs the question, what is necessary?

What is to be done? Paul has set out the sort of men that they are, their lips, their lives, the damage they do, but what is to be done?

[23 : 34] deceitful teachers are to be silenced. Paul is extremely direct when it comes to dealing with the deceitful teachers.

He says two things. First, Titus is to silence them, verse 11. They must be silenced, muzzled. Their mouths must be stopped.

And secondly, Titus is to rebuke them sharply, verse 13. And the purpose of the two approaches is key. They are to be silenced because they are destroying churches through what they say.

It is their words that are causing the major damage. Their speech is empty. They are deceitful, so they must be silenced. Now, suppose that the temptation for us when faced with a situation like this might be to take a gentle approach, perhaps not wanting people to lose face, you pull this dangerous teacher to the side and you let him down gently, give him other areas in the church to work in, less important meetings to speak at.

None of that, says Paul, silence him, shut the door, get him out the door, whatever it takes, make sure that they do not utter another word in the church or to any of its members.

[25 : 04] Their words are empty, they're deceivers, they're liars, silence them. It's a hard line, isn't it?

But it is necessary. They're to be silenced, but that's not all Paul says. In verse 13, he says, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.

they are to be silenced, but that silencing is to be accompanied by explanation. Titus is to leave them with no doubt in their minds that they are in error.

They aren't being silenced due to some power struggle or because Titus doesn't much like them. No, it's made clear that they are silenced because they are in error.

They've been speaking untruth, and Titus is to instruct them in sound doctrine. So yes, Paul is seeking to protect the church.

[26 : 03] Don't let them utter another word so that the flock are protected, but he also wants to see ultimately these deceivers restored, brought to knowledge of the truth, and to the sort of living that accords with that truth.

Perhaps that's surprising given all that we've said about what these men were doing, the impact they were having, but ultimately Paul wants to see men like that restored. There were bad teachers on Crete.

There were lots of them. There were bad teachers in Scotland. What is Titus to do? What are we to do?

Well, we are to appoint, pray for, encourage, support, support, good teachers. That's what he spends the first half of the chapter on.

Men who hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, able to give instruction and sound doctrine, and able to rebuke those who contradict it. Appoint good teachers, things.

[27 : 17] But also be willing to stand up to error. And so when Willie, when the church leadership stand firm in the face of false teaching, when they openly and publicly contradict error, when they seek to silence them in order to protect the church family, when they do that, make sure you give them your full support.

Support them as they stand for the truth. Now let me say that it was a privilege for me to see this in action when I arrived to work in the church in September 2012.

The unity of the church at that point and support for its leadership was a good thing to see. It was an encouraging thing to see. But let us be prepared to continue to do that in the future.

If your church leader is willing to put his head above the parapet, to stand up to error, give thanks and support him, it is sometimes necessary.

And I know that nobody enjoys doing it. So let us support and pray for our leaders as they do this. Perhaps you're worried about the current state of the church in Scotland, in Glasgow.

[28 : 50] Are you worried for the future of the church? Worried about what's being taught? Well, Paul's remedy is the appointment of good teachers.

Get behind good teachers. Remember that it is the truth that leads to godliness. To deviate from that truth leads ultimately to disaster. So let us be those who listen to good teachers.

Get behind those who train good teachers. Pray for them, support them, give to them.

The stakes are high. Eternal life, everlasting death is at stake. what is taught in the church really matters.

It matters because when the truth is proclaimed, lives are changed, lives are transformed. And for people to come into the church with a false gospel, that is dangerous thing.

[30 : 00] So let us stand up to that. amen. Let me pray. Amen. Father, you have in your word promised us a wonderful gospel of salvation that brings eternal life.

love. And as we see in this letter, the proclamation of your truth leads to godliness, which in turn adorns the gospel for the watching world.

How precious your church is. And so we ask for courage, courage, and strength for those who lead us, for us as a church, that we would do what's necessary and sometimes face up to conflict when the truth is at stake.

So we ask for your help in this, for the sake of the gospel. Amen.