

Deceit and Defilement in the Church

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn now to God's Word, to the Scriptures, and read together. And as I said, we're reading in Paul's letter to Titus. And we're going to read the whole of chapter 1, as we did last week.

Edward Lobb has begun a little series on this letter. And he's looking today particularly at the second half of chapter 1, but we'll read from the beginning, so that we all get clear.

Titus 1, verse 1. 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 into order.

And appoint elders in every time as I directed you. 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.

[1 : 3 2] For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. Must not be arrogant, or quick-tempered, or drunkard, or violent, or greedy for gain.

But humble, hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.

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.

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, and lazy gluttons.

[2 : 3 6] 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 turn away from the truth.

To the pure, all things are pure. But to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure. But with their minds and their consciences are defiled.

They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Good evening, friends.

Very good to see you all here. Let's turn to Titus chapter 1. And our passage is verses 10 to 16. And my title is this, Deceit and Defilement in the Church.

[3 : 4 4] If you can get sight of a text, I think you'll find that helpful. When our last week, we were studying the first part of this chapter 1 in Titus. And we spent some time, particularly in verses 6 to 9, where Paul is teaching Titus what to look for in church leaders.

Because one of Titus' main responsibilities on the island of Crete, where he was stationed for a while, was, in the words of verse 5, that he must appoint elders for the young churches in every town.

Well, why that? Because the churches need leaders. Christ is the shepherd of the whole flock, but he entrusts shepherdly responsibility to many people who are effectively his under-shepherds.

And you'll see Paul describes them in verse 5 as elders, and in verse 7 as overseers. It's the same people that he's talking about. And their responsibility is to take care of the Lord's people at the local level, primarily by teaching them the truth from the scriptures.

And if they are going to do that well, perhaps you'd look with me at verse 9 for a moment, they need to be able not only to give instruction in sound doctrine, but also to rebuke or refute those who contradict it.

[5 : 03] And this means that they need to know the truth of the Bible, but they also need a good working knowledge of ideas and teachings which contradict the Bible's message and are incompatible with it.

So they need to be able to smell out theological rats, and they need to know how to dispatch them. So at a certain level, good church leaders have to be intolerant people.

They have to be willing to say to their people, don't believe this, and don't tolerate or entertain that idea, because it's a false idea. They have to draw lines. Now let's notice the join between verse 9 and verse 10.

It's all there in the first word of verse 10, that little word, F-O-R, for. And that word for is a very important word in the Bible, and it's used a great deal throughout the Bible, and its usual function is to show that what follows it is explaining and unpacking what precedes it.

And its usual function is to show, as I say, that the whole thing is being unpacked and explained further, and that's how it's used here. Verses 10 to 16 are explaining and unpacking why Paul has written what he has written in verses 6 to 9, and especially verse 9.

[6 : 21] You see, why must a church leader be able to teach the truth accurately and refute or rebuke those who contradict it? Because, verse 10, there are many who contradict it.

There are many who are, as Paul puts it, insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers. Not just one or two, but many. Now this problem of false teaching is a problem that stretches right back to the very beginning of the church.

And as we grasp what Paul is saying in verses 10 to 16, we realize that it's not just a problem of false teaching, it's a problem of false living. Because belief and behavior always go together.

Sound doctrine produces godly behavior, but false teaching produces not only false thinking, but also the kind of behavior that Paul has to call in this paragraph deceptive, shameful, defiled, and detestable.

And you'll see he uses very strong language to describe these people who are endangering the life of the church. And therefore, Paul, by his example, is teaching us to be very determined to keep false teaching and false living out of our churches.

[7 : 37] Now this so much goes against the grain of so much that is praised in our world today. Many people would say to us, don't be so harsh. Don't be so narrow.

Can't you make room in your thinking and in your churches for a broad spectrum of views? Can't you be a broad church? The world is so full of fierce language and conflict with people taking up strongly defended positions and battling with each other.

Can't the church be open to 500 shades of gray? Now how did Jesus use words like broad and narrow? He said, enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is broad and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many but the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few.

So Paul is simply following his master Jesus in sharply distinguishing the true from the false. The kind of church leader described here in verse 9 cannot be endlessly nice.

He cannot say to everybody who comes to the church, it really doesn't matter what you believe and it really doesn't matter how you live because all beliefs and all lifestyles are welcome here. This is an inclusive church.

[8 : 58] When church leaders start talking like that, you know that they're turning their backs on the truth. You know that they have lost the ability, lost the will to defend the truth and to refute those who contradict it.

Real Christian faith and true Christian living can only flourish where church leaders are willing to draw lines. We're turning then to our passage verses 10 to 16.

We need first to look at this can of worms that Paul is opening up for us. I find it very uncomfortable reading and I guess you do as well. There's a part of me that wishes that we could be looking at something more pleasant.

But God has caused Paul to write these words for our benefit. So we need to read them for two main reasons. First, to make us aware of what goes on in some churches, lest we should naively think that all churches are well led or that all church leaders are godly people.

And second, we should read this paragraph as a warning to those who are currently in church leadership positions and to those who might one day in the future be responsible church leaders.

[10 : 11] And that might well include a number of the younger people who are here today. So let's notice the details of Paul's description of false and damaging leadership.

The core attitude of the false leader is that he is unwilling to stick to the Bible. But he's unwilling to submit to its teaching. Just look at the last few words in verse 14.

Who turn away from the truth. I'll put that phrase properly in context in a few minutes' time. But the phrase by itself shows the fundamental attitude of people who refuse to acknowledge the authority of God.

There is a turning away from the truth. The truth of the Bible should be greeted by all of us with a bowed head. But these people are greeting it with a turned back. They turn away.

In 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul writes of people who swerve from the truth. It's as though they see the truth coming towards them, claiming their allegiance, but they swerve away. They avoid it.

[11 : 16] And there are two other words which top and tail the passage, but are really making the same point. Verse 10, insubordinate. And then verse 16, disobedient.

Insubordinate means unwilling to submit to properly constituted authority. And disobedient means more or less the same thing. The Bible is a command to be obeyed as well as an invitation to be accepted.

The preaching of Jesus is a command. Come to me, he says, all you who are weary and heavy laden. Believe in me and you will have eternal life. The whole of the Bible is God preaching to the world and his command is repent and believe.

But the false church leader wriggles away from the Bible and says, we can't really mean this. Or they will say, well, people used to think like that, but modern research in psychology and anthropology is showing us a better way to live.

So the Bible is an interesting historical and antiquarian document, but the human race has matured in the last two millennia and we found better ways which are more conducive to human happiness.

[12 : 32] Now friends, that kind of talk is a sophisticated version of the first words in the Bible spoken by the devil. Did God really say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

God speaks with absolute clarity, but the devil's tactic is to undermine God's words and to invite his listeners to join him in his insubordination, his unwillingness to submit to proper authority.

And the other phrases here in verse 10 fill out this picture of insubordination further. These people are empty talkers and deceivers, says Paul.

They're talkers. They're happy to talk the hind leg off a donkey. In fact, they've done so much talking they're surrounded by three-legged donkeys. But the talk is empty, says Paul.

There's no substance there. There's nothing to bring solid joy or hope. And they are deceivers. The hallmark of Satan's talk is that it's designed to lead us astray.

[13 : 39] At the end of verse 10, Paul explains that much of this empty talk and deceit comes from those he calls the circumcision party. Jewish people who insisted that salvation could only be enjoyed by those who obeyed Jewish ritual observance.

The circumcision of baby boys, keeping the kosher food laws, observing all the festivals and feast days, and so on. Paul explains in his letter to the Galatians how that kind of talk is a denial of the gospel because it assumes that we can be our own saviors by keeping rules.

It's a tick-box DIY religion that cannot save us because it doesn't address our real problem, the problem of our sin, which has separated us from God, a problem so unbearably great that you and I could never resolve it even if we lived for a thousand years.

Only Christ can rescue us from the penalty of our sins and he could only do it by dying on the cross for us. So any talk that bypasses the death of Jesus as the means of our salvation is empty talk.

It's deceptive because it holds out to us a false route to salvation. So the heart of false leadership back then in the first century and today is an unwillingness to accept the authority of the Bible and to submit to it.

[15 : 08] And those of us who are currently in positions of leadership and teaching and those of you who will be one day, we need to search our own hearts and ask if we're willing to be people of the Bible to the nth degree.

And if we detect an element of insubordination in our hearts, we must deal with it. Look back to verse 9. We must hold fast to the trustworthy word as taught.

Now the next mark of false leadership as verse 11 describes it is greed for money. Verse 11. They must be silenced since they're upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

So not only is their teaching false, but their motivation in wanting to be teachers is corrupt. Look back to the end of verse 7. The true teacher says Paul must not be greedy for gain.

Paul says famously in 1 Timothy chapter 6, the love of money is the root of many evil things. And the love of money can become a pressing desire. Paul uses the word craving in 1 Timothy 6.

[16 : 19] Now of course the right kind of church leader does need to be paid. And Paul makes that point very clearly in several places in his letters. The old-fashioned word for a pastor's remuneration is not salary but stipend.

And the idea of the stipend is that it's an annual allowance made over to the pastor by the church because he's not earning a living in the regular workplace. He's not working as a teacher or an engineer or a plumber but he and his family need to eat and need to have a roof over their heads.

So the church makes over a suitable amount to him to support him. Not too little but also not too much. The purpose of the stipend is to free him from the anxiety that he might not be able to care for his dependents.

But we've all heard true stories of church leaders who impoverish the people in their church so as to sustain a lavish lifestyle for themselves. A craving for money says Paul is a corrupting influence.

We're now verse 12. One of the Cretans a prophet of their own said Cretans are always liars evil beasts lazy gluttons. This testimony says Paul is true.

[17 : 39] Now some Bible commentators have suggested that Paul might have had his tongue in his cheek at this point but I rather doubt it. I'm sure Paul had a great sense of humor but he doesn't use humor in his letters because what he's writing about is so serious.

This Cretan prophet that he's quoting here is almost certainly a man called Epimenides who lived in the 6th century BC at the Cretan town of Knossos and he was honored on the island as a prophet and miracle worker and he had a pretty low opinion of his compatriots calling them always liars evil beasts lazy gluttons.

As for the evil beasts apparently Epimenides joked that the absence of wild animals on the island of Crete was made up for by the island's human inhabitants.

So they must have been a pretty rough bunch. Mind you Paul had never reached Britain and if he had he might have had some sharp things to say about our ancestors. The point Paul is making here to Titus is that Titus has a big job on his hands.

He's dealing here with some intractable material. Look at the next sentence in verse 13. Therefore he says rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith.

[18 : 55] But Paul is not just giving a sketch of Cretan character as if he were writing a brochure for a cruise ship company and wanting to warn holidaymakers to keep their hands on their wallets if they were on the island.

No, he's writing about a prevalent ethnic characteristic which seeps into the Cretan churches and warps the character of these people who are wanting to gain influence in the churches.

He's mentioned empty talk and deceit in verse 10 and lying is at the heart of deceit. Satan lies and deceives and all lying ultimately stems from him.

But Paul doesn't consider Crete to be a hopeless case. He says here in verse 13 rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith.

Paul knows the transforming power of the gospel. He knows that by the grace of God the liar can become truthful. The evil beast can become gentle.

[19 : 56] The lazy glutton can become hard working and self-controlled. Paul himself had been transformed from being a hater of Jesus into a man who loved Jesus above everything and everybody.

And Paul clearly didn't think that Crete was a lost cause. If he had despaired of Crete he would never have asked Titus to appoint leaders for the churches. These elders that Titus had to appoint were to be Cretans.

They weren't going to be flown in from some other country on the ground that no Cretan could ever qualify to be a good leader. Paul believed that the liar, the evil beast and the lazy glutton could be transformed by the gospel of grace.

Well we've seen so far that insubordination and disobedience to God are at the heart of false church leadership. But verses 14 to 16 Paul clarifies the problem further and he helps us to see this kind of ungodliness more clearly.

So first from verse 14 as these false religionists turn away from the truth what do they devote themselves to?

[21 : 09] What captures their interest instead? What Paul tells us there. Jewish myths probably what he refers to in chapter 3 verse 9 as genealogies dissensions and quarrels about the law.

and verse 14 the commands of people. People who turn away from the truth. Now do you remember how Jesus had to rebuke the Pharisees?

He said to them you let go the commands of God in order to hold on to the traditions of men. And this is what these false leaders at Crete were doing. And it's what false religion does the world over.

It forsakes divine revelation for human opinions. Let me give you an example of this. About 25 years ago when I was a Church of England vicar I wrote to my bishop very senior church leader.

Questions of sexuality had arisen in the Church of England then and they were beginning to become rather pressing and I was concerned about the direction that the Church of England was taking. So I wrote to my bishop about this.

[22 : 12] And he wrote back to me and said this. It's all very well for you to quote the Bible to me Edward about these things. But we're still awaiting the results of research being done into human sexuality by geneticists and biologists.

And we can't form any firm opinion about these things until modern research has enlightened us further. Now that's how a Church leader can turn away from the truth of the Bible.

The divine revelation. So that their views can be molded by human opinion. Psalm 19 says the law of the Lord is perfect.

But that kind of Church leadership is saying that the Bible is imperfect. It's insufficient for us and we must seek assurance from other and more modern sources. Then verse 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. Now Paul is thinking here about things like food and marriage.

[23 : 21] Jesus declared all foods to be clean and therefore pure and acceptable. So the kosher food laws no longer exist for the Christian. But in the unbelieving mind, especially in this context, the Jewish mind that turns away from Christ, the idea of defilement still exists and the conscience therefore is spoiled.

Or think of marriage. Marriage, as taught by the Bible, is pure and lovely. It brings no defilement to the conscience of those who follow the Bible's teaching about marriage.

That marriage is a lifelong faithful union between a man and a woman. But those who reject the Bible's teaching on marriage inevitably have a deeply uneasy conscience about their way of life, however much they might profess that their conscience is at ease.

They say to us, I remember a poster appearing in the Central Station some years ago put up by Stonewall. The poster read, you may remember it, said, get over it.

Get over it. The world is changing. But the very fact that a group like Stonewall has to keep on saying get over it testifies to the fact that the human conscience cannot get over it.

[24 : 36] Sex has become defiled and the conscience therefore is corrupted. To the pure all things are pure. But to the defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure. Both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

Now it's very strong language, isn't it? It's the kind of thing that we might shrink from saying in a school staff room or at a wedding reception. But Paul says it and we need to believe it or we shall lose our way and our moral understanding will become distorted.

False teaching produces corrupted living and consciences lose the ability to distinguish right from wrong. Now verse 16.

They profess to know God but they deny him by their works. Now the old fashioned name for that is hypocrisy. Ask some of these church leaders if they're Christian and they'll reply, well, yes, of course we're Christian.

The Bible is read out loud at our services. We recite the Apostles Creed. Our sermons pick up thoughts from scripture. We give money to relieve need in society. They profess to know God.

[25 : 51] But, says Paul, their profession is denied by their works. In other words, their lifestyle. That's exactly what Jesus had taught in very colorful language in Matthew chapter 7 where he says, beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will recognize them by their fruits. Ravenous wolves and yet appearing so sheep-like. Charming voices. Ready smiles.

Gentle behavior. If the wolf wore wolf's clothing, we would immediately recognize him. But he doesn't. He wears sheep's clothing. Paul uses just the same picture in Acts chapter 20.

I know he says that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. The wolf wants to destroy and devour God's flock and to take people away from Christ and therefore away from eternal life.

It's not an alternative Christianity that they're offering. It's a destruction of Christianity. It's an all-out assault on the gospel. So friends, we mustn't be naive.

[27 : 05] We must be on our guard. If friends of ours get into the clutches of people like this, we must go after them and rescue them. So how does Paul conclude this section on these false religionists?

Well, look at verse 16. He says they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. Now again, notice just how strong his language is.

People like us, perhaps particularly in a country like Britain, we tend to wrap things up in bubble wrap and brown paper, lest our sensitive little feelings get shocked by the ugly reality of what's inside.

But Paul wraps nothing up. His purpose is to expose reality, not to conceal it. And this paragraph in Titus chapter 1 has been included by God in the scriptures as a warning to the churches through the ages that there will never be a shortage of people who want to deceive our thinking and lead us astray.

And God warns us in scripture like this because he loves us. He cares about us. So we need to ask this question. How is Titus to respond to this situation?

[28 : 20] Does he just throw up his hands in despair and say, oh, it's all too difficult. I can't face these problems. So I think I'll leave the battlefield and live a quiet life somewhere else. Well, clearly that's no answer to the problem.

Or does he give the kind of answer that many people like to give in the 21st century? Oh, everybody can hold his own opinion. That man's view differs from mine, but we can surely live together in the same congregation.

That's the kind of thing the Church of England has been trying to do for decades, trying to hold together under one roof people of diametrically opposed views. And it's impossible.

It means in effect that people who really do believe the Bible are being told that their views carry no more weight than the views of people who reject the authority of the Bible. So this creates a situation in which the Bible is no longer the touchstone of truth, no longer the decisive revelation that shapes the belief and conduct of the church.

So the consequence is that the Church of England, I'm speaking about it because I used to be in it, it's like an old ship which has been cut adrift from its moorings and is now being tossed about on the open sea with no kind of pilot to steer it.

- [29 : 36] Everything falls apart. There's no consensus of belief to hold it together and no ethical discipline to keep people's conduct in line with the Bible's teaching. So if Titus were to take that view in dealing with the churches on Crete, the whole gospel project on the island would fall to pieces in no time at all.

What then is Titus to do? Well, the problem is widespread. Look again at verse 10. There are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers.

It's not just a matter of one or two rotten apples in the barrel. The problem is everywhere, in every town. Well, let's look at Paul's solution in three parts.

Three parts. First, verse 11. They must be silenced. Second, verse 13. Rebuke them sharply. And then third, I won't tell you what that is till we've looked at points one and two.

So first of all, verse 11. They must be silenced. Somehow Titus must stop their voice from being heard in the church. Now, of course, he can't stop them speaking elsewhere in the streets or the marketplaces, but he must gag their influence within the congregation.

- [30 : 51] So how could he do this? And how can we do it today? Paul doesn't say exactly how, but perhaps the first way is by discussion, by argument, talking things over, trying to persuade a false teacher of his error.

And if that fails, there needs to be discipline, banning or barring a person from attending the meetings of the church. It might be necessary for a church leader to explain to a congregation that Mr.

So-and-so has been barred from attending because he's leading people astray. Tough measure, but it does have to be done sometimes. Secondly, from verse 13, rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith.

Now, this shows that Paul has not given up on them. He sees the possibility of change from falsehood to truth, the possibility that some of them can be rescued. Jesus was just like this in his battling conversations with the Pharisees.

He knew that most of them rejected him with great hostility. They were the false religionists of his day. But there's one situation in John's Gospel, chapter 5, a situation of great tension and fierce argument going on.

- [32 : 06] When Jesus says to these hostile Pharisees, I'm saying these things to you so that you may be saved. And some of them did come to him. For example, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea and no doubt others.

So Paul says to Titus, rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith. There is a possibility of rescuing some. You'll know how the book of Proverbs in many places speaks of the power of a wise rebuke.

Let me give you just one little quotation from Proverbs. The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.

I think many of us know that to have one's shortcomings revealed by an older and wiser person can be a life-giving, even life-saving experience. I once received a sharp rebuke when I was a university student aged about 19.

Many of you have been there, haven't you? I was enjoying university life far too much and I was not working at all hard. And my tutor, a severe man of about 50, said to me one day, Mr. Lobb, your attitude towards your work is not even that of a dilettante.

- [33 : 32] I had to look up dilettante. I discovered that it's somebody who toys with life and doesn't take anything seriously. Not even that of a dilettante.

Now I can tell you those words stung me as they were intended to. And from that day on, I did begin to work. I didn't win any prizes. At least I got a moderately good degree at the end of it. Now that rebuke was not directed at false teaching.

It was directed at juvenile bone idleness. But the more senior Christian who rebukes the false religionist will sometimes find that the person rebuked changes course and becomes, in Paul's words, sound in the faith.

Now I'm coming to my third point in just a moment, but let's stand back from the text just for a moment to think about Paul's strong language. I've referred to it once or twice already this evening, but I want to ask why he uses words as fiercely as this.

This paragraph is full of fierce words and expressions. Insubordinate. Empty talkers and deceivers. Shameful gain. Then he quotes this thing from Epimenides.

[34 : 43] Liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons. And Paul clearly endorses those words. And then later on, defiled in mind and conscience. Detestable.

I think in our 21st century Western atmosphere, we feel most uncomfortable about using language quite as forcefully as this. We'll perhaps speak of false religionists as being wrong or deceived.

We're willing to say, Mr. So-and-so is leading people astray. But to call somebody detestable or defiled seems too much. It seems irresponsibly intemperate.

Now, I'm not suggesting that we encourage our younger preachers to shout in the pulpit and foam at the mouth and go red in the face and pour out streams of anger. Not at all.

But I think we have to ask ourselves whether we take issues of truth and falsehood seriously enough. What is at stake here is God's honor and people's eternal destiny.

[35 : 43] False teaching deeply dishonors God and it leads people into eternal judgment. It bars them from salvation. Some years ago, I was out in Lanarkshire preaching at a church there and I was having lunch with one of the senior elders.

We were discussing his church and he said to me, Do you know, I sometimes think that at our church we're just playing with Christianity. Playing with Christianity.

I've never forgotten that phrase. Paul does not play with anything. He's concerned with the eternal salvation of precious men and women. That's why he uses intemperate language.

The gospel is so important. Jesus also uses the strongest language to warn us against false teaching. For example, in Matthew chapter 23, he says, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

You travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

[36 : 50] You're like whitewashed tombs which outwardly appear beautiful but within are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. You outwardly appear righteous to others but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Now that is our gentle saviour roused to the most powerful expressions of anger and grief because he's concerned with people's eternal salvation.

May God help us to feel the issues as strongly as he does and as strongly as Paul does. Well finally, point three which is the most important instruction to Titus about how false teaching is to be counted.

It's all there in verses five to nine. The way to diminish the influence of false teachers is to provide the churches with plenty of true teachers.

If there are many false teachers and verse 10 assures us that there are then Titus and his successors today must multiply the numbers of true teachers.

[37 : 56] And that friends is an invigorating, joyful, challenging task. Just run your eye again over verses six to nine. A suitable person, a suitable man must be above reproach, faithful in marriage and in family life, self-disciplined in regard to alcohol, money and temper, hospitable.

And as a teacher of the faith he must be one who knows how to teach the gospel and the Christian life and one who has the courage to refute the false teaching that contradicts the true teaching.

He must be trained and tested. He must learn the truth as it has been taught. He needs to be tested as a person of integrity and sound character. And therefore the selection and training of our future church leaders is one of the most important things that churches can do.

Good leaders, good pastors don't just appear. They don't fall out of the sky. They have to be spotted, encouraged and trained. And one of the joys of our church here is that training is available.

The Thursday night release the Word program for young adults gives excellent basic training in handling the Bible and beginning to lead Bible studies. Then there's the Cornhill training course, not part of the church as such but very close to us.

[39 : 18] It's much more stretching. It gives men and women students a more extensive grasp on how the Bible fits together and how one goes about putting Bible talks and sermons together. And the Cornhill Pastors Training course opens up a view on how the Bible shapes every part of the Christian life.

And the course prepares men for the demanding role of how to pastor a church. A role that is very difficult but by the grace of God not impossible. And the vision of our pastors training course is to provide well-trained, courageous pastors for churches right across Scotland.

Not just in the major centers of population but in smaller towns and villages as well. Scotland needs to be re-evangelized. And it's the provision of well-trained and determined new pastors that can bring this about by the grace of God.

So young men, I'm looking at the young men here. It's a daunting task. It's not for everybody. But even if you're very young, if you can see yourself growing into the kind of person described in verses 6 to 9, this could be the work for you to do in due course after appropriate testing and training.

Talk to one of our younger ministers here who've been through the training and are now working on the job. Tap them for information because they will gladly tell you. So Titus and his successors have a challenging but wonderful task.

[40 : 47] Appoint elders in every town. Why? Because there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers. It's the trustworthy word as taught that builds up the church and brings salvation.

Well, let's pray together. We thank you, dear Heavenly Father, for Paul's clear distinctions between the true and the false.

Thank you for his courage. Thank you for the strength of his language which wakes us up to the urgency of the situation. Raise up, we pray, many true teachers and true pastors who will bring the gospel afresh into Scotland and keep all of us faithful to your truth and hungry both to learn it and to live by it.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.