

The Silencing of the Wolves

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[0 : 00] We're in the middle of a short series in Paul's letter to Titus, and in a moment we'll be reading chapter one together. But before we do that, we'll spend a moment in prayer, so let's pray together, shall we?

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the privilege that we have in calling you our Father. Father, you reign over all the earth. You made everything that we see, everything we touch and smell and taste.

You made everything. How powerful you are. So much greater than we can ever comprehend. And yet you are mindful of mere creatures like us.

Help us as we gather together this afternoon to remember the great comforts of the gospel. That our only comfort in life and death is that we are not our own, but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Thank you that his work done on the cross for us has paid for our sins and set us free from the tyranny of the devil.

[1 : 25] Thank you that Jesus Christ watches over us even now. Thank you that Jesus Christ.

Please protect your church. Would you raise up good teachers so that your gospel may advance? And we ask this for your name and glory, and we ask it in the name of Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Good. Well, please do turn to Titus, chapter 1. That's page 998 in the church Bibles there. And we're focusing on verses 10 to 16 this afternoon, but I'll read the whole chapter so we can get the flow of things.

So Titus, and I'll pick it up from chapter 1, 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 God's elect and 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.

[3 : 26] 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.

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.

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, but 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 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.

[4 : 43] One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, says, 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 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 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.

But as for you, Titus, teach what accords with sound doctrine. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. Now, I can't think of that many people who enjoy conflict.

[5 : 59] In fact, most of us go out of our way to avoid it, don't we? There are some who enjoy good fights. They like a good argument. One of my younger brothers would be a bit like that.

He would happily argue with an inanimate object if the opportunity arose. But I imagine that most of us enjoy the quiet life away from controversy.

And especially so when it comes to the church. We often think that conflict has no place. Something must be wrong with this conflict in the church, surely.

It's just not very Christian. Someone misbehaves. Let's just sweep it under the carpet. Keep it quiet. Someone speaks untruth.

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

[7 : 02] We'll 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 verses 10 to 16 this afternoon.

He takes aim because the truth is at stake. The health of the church is at stake. Issues of eternity and salvation are at stake.

Remember that Paul's big concern in the letter to Titus is that he would insist on the teaching of the truth on Crete. Truth that leads to godliness.

You see, Paul expected to see good and godly living in the Cretan church. And that was only going to happen through the teaching of the truth. The letter is littered with instructions to teach.

And what that teaching was to produce. Namely, godly living. Because only the gospel transforms. So Titus' big task.

[8 : 12] His main priority was to appoint the sort of men that would hold to the truth. To appoint men that would teach the truth and contradict error.

We saw that last week in verse 9. Affirmation of truth necessarily means contradiction of error. Those two things go hand in hand for the sort of men that Titus is to appoint.

And our verses this afternoon show us why the willingness to contradict 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 pick it up 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 in sound doctrine. And also to rebuke those who contradict it.

[9 : 13] For there are many who are insubordinate. Empty talkers and deceivers. Why does Paul insist on teachers in the mold of chapter 1 verse 9?

Why does he insist on that sort of teacher? Well he does it because the teachers in the mold of chapter 1 verse 10 exist. And there are plenty of them too.

For there are many who are insubordinate. Empty talkers and deceivers. Many. This was a major problem on Crete. Deceitful teachers were in and amongst the young church.

They were as we will see destroying the church. Their teaching most certainly did not lead to godliness. Just look down at verse 16.

Unfit for any good work. It's a big problem for a young vulnerable church. And the solution was good teachers.

[10 : 29] Teachers who had the authority to insist on truth and rebuke error. Now our task this afternoon is a less pleasant one than last week.

Last time we considered the tasks and the traits of the good teacher. The sort of men that we're to look out for. The sort of men we're to encourage into teaching and leading roles in the church.

The sort of men that we're to look out for. But this week it's the flip side of that coin. We're considering the deceitful teachers. Wolves.

As Paul calls them in other letters. Wolves in and amongst the flock. What marks them out as dangerous?

What impact are these men actually having? Are they really that dangerous? And what's to be done? Three things this afternoon.

[11 : 25] Firstly, the marks of these teachers. Deceitful teachers. Deny God through their distorted teaching. And disobedient lives.

Crete. As we've seen. Was not top of the list. In terms of holiday destinations in the first century. The people there were evil beasts. Lazy gluttons.

They were hopeless hosts. Not particularly nice people. And it certainly was not a place top of the list. If you wanted to be a missionary. And verse 12 smacks us right between the eyes.

Doesn't it? That. We think it's a bit over the top. Don't we? Cretans are always liars. Evil beasts. Lazy gluttons. The national stereotype is not flattering.

But it is accurate. Notice Paul's comment in verse 13. This testimony is true. The Cretan culture.

[12 : 27] Lies. Laziness. Selfishness. Had clearly infused the Cretan church. The teaching. Had been altered.

And rather than insist on the truth. In the face of rampant. And obvious ungodliness. In the culture around. Certain people in the church.

Were teaching a distorted gospel. One that they ought not to teach. Perhaps they do that. Perhaps they're teaching this stuff. In the hope that they might appeal to the surrounding culture.

Let's tone it down. Let's fit in. But what was the nature of their teaching? Well it seems to be that those from the circumcision party. Are the ones at the forefront of Paul's mind here.

They teach religion. Look at verse 14. Jewish myths. The commands of people who turn away from the truth. In the face of.

[13 : 30] Obvious ungodliness. In the surrounding culture. These deceitful teachers. Offer religion as the answer. Not convinced that the truth. Will deliver what's required.

They have resorted to good old religion. Here's some stuff you can do. 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 not immune from that ourselves. We are naturally attracted to the stuff.

That has the appearance of religion. Just merely attending church. Just being there. You're there every Sunday without fail. And yet.

You're not seeking to serve others. You're not seeking to build others up in the church. In any way. You're just there to show face. Not daring to touch a drop of alcohol.

[14 : 31] But it's quite a right to give the missus a hard time behind closed doors. Stuff we can easily do on the surface. We can tick off. Complete. Stuff that falls a long way short.

Of the wholehearted. Total good living. That Paul expected to see in the Christian church. In a culture that finds the gospel.

A very alien message indeed. There is a temptation to dress it up in religion. Isn't there? A few nice religious ritual experiences.

A focus. A focus. On social action. To the exclusion of communication of the gospel. A desire to be well thought of. Inoffensive.

To be considered tolerant. A good dose of religion will get you that. But it is fundamentally deceitful. It falls short of instruction and sound doctrine.

[15 : 31] These deceitful teachers on Crete. They spoke of a man-made religion. They distance themselves from the truth.

Through what they say. But also through how they live. The fruit of their teaching is seen in their lives. They profess to know God. But in reality they deny him by their works.

You see true knowledge of God. True knowledge of God is indistinguishable. Inseparable from godly living says Paul.

They come together. And these guys show that they don't know God at all. Through the way that they live. They are detestable. Disobedient.

Unfit for any good work. Verse 16. Perhaps you suspect. A teacher is perhaps not the real deal. Look at his life.

[16 : 33] Look beyond the smooth words. Does he affirm what the Bible says? And the next minute turn a blind eye to obvious.

Blatant disobedience in his congregation. Such a man. Is a deceitful teacher. One whose life betrays his lips.

Such men are wolves. Out to feed themselves. To boost their egos. To satisfy their lusts. Look beyond the words. Look at the man.

His life. That says Paul. To Titus. Is the key test. Look at their works. So there's our first point.

And it's a sobering one. Isn't it? Deceitful teachers deny God through their distorted teaching. And their disobedient lives. But what about the impact such men are having?

[17 : 36] They exist. That much is obvious. But what real danger do they present? Why was Titus to take issue with this? What impact are they having?

And Paul could not be clearer. These deceitful teachers are destroying the church. They're destroying the church. And the stakes are that high.

Really understanding what is in play gives real motivation to wanting to tackle these deceitful men. Paul says in verse 11 that these empty talkers, these deceivers must be silenced.

Since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. When Paul makes reference to families here, the word is households.

And in this context it probably means household churches. Household churches are being upset. It's not what we think of in terms of nuclear families here, but rather household of God.

[18 : 42] It's the church. These deceitful teachers are upsetting whole households. Whole churches. Not just the odd individual, but whole churches.

We perhaps don't feel the force of the upsetting language here. But it must surely be significant distress and turmoil. Church is being torn apart.

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

A young and vulnerable church on the island of Crete. A church that he himself was barely able to establish. That's why Paul is there.

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.

[19 : 42] They're destroying the church. 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. His church is being destroyed by deceitful teachers.

The church is no small thing in God's sight. It is precious in the sight of God, in the sight of Paul. Each little household church on Crete.

Each church here in Glasgow that holds the apostolic gospel. Each one is precious in the sight of God. And for empty talkers to come in.

To upset the church. Well, that's a very serious thing indeed. It is no small thing to upset the household of God.

[20 : 44] How dare they? How dare they? We perhaps see now why Paul uses such colorful language in verse 16.

Perhaps we cringe slightly when that was read out earlier. A little strong, don't you think, Paul? Need to tone it down a bit? Not at all.

The church is at stake. And we need to see the real impact that empty talkers like this have. Men whose lives deny their lips.

Men who peddle religion rather than proclaiming the gospel. Men whose teaching does not produce godliness but rather the opposite.

You and I ought to pray for protection against such people. Pray for your church leaders. That they might be alert to deceitful teachers like this.

[21 : 48] Pray that they would see them for what they really 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? And our final point this afternoon is that deceitful teachers must be silenced. They must be silenced.

Paul is extremely direct when it comes to dealing with the deceitful teachers. Two things. First, Titus is to silence them. Verse 11.

And two, Titus is to rebuke them sharply. There in verse 13. And the purpose of the two approaches he is to take is key.

They are to be silenced because they are destroying churches through what they say. It's their words that are causing the damage. Their speech is empty.

[22 : 47] They are deceitful. So they must be silenced. I suppose the temptation for us when faced with a situation like this might be to take the gentle approach.

Perhaps not wanting people to lose face. We pull the dangerous teacher to one side. Let him down gently. Give him other areas in the church to work in.

Less important meetings to speak at. But Paul is having none of that. Silence him. Shut him down. No more speaking opportunities.

Get him out the door. Whatever it takes, make sure that he does not utter another word in the church. Their words are empty. They are deceivers.

Liars. They are to be silenced. Is that a hard line? Yes. Is it necessary?

[23 : 47] Absolutely. 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 with explanation. Titus is to leave them in no doubt in their minds that they are an error. They aren't being silenced due to some power struggle in the church.

Or because Titus doesn't like them. It's to be made clear that they have been an error. They have been speaking untruth. And Titus is to instruct them in sound doctrine.

Yes, Paul is seeking to protect the church. But he also ultimately wants to bring these deceivers back to the true faith.

He wants to see them restored, brought to knowledge of the truth. To the sort of living that accords with the truth. There are bad teachers on Crete.

[24 : 50] There will be bad teachers in churches in this country. What is Titus to do? What are we to do? We're to appoint, pray for, encourage, support good teachers.

Men who will hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught. Able to give instruction and sound doctrine. And able to rebuke those who contradict it.

That is our task. Listen to those sort of men. Appoint those sort of men. Are you worried about the current state of the church?

Here in Glasgow. Across Scotland. Are you worried for the future of the church? Get behind good teachers.

Remember that is the truth. And only the truth that leads to godliness. To deviate from that. To deviate from the truth.

[26 : 02] Leads ultimately to disaster. Listen to good teachers. Get behind those who train good teachers. Pray for them.

Financially support them. Get behind them. The stakes are very high indeed. The survival of the church. The survival of the church on Crete depended on Titus.

Appointing good teachers. The future of the church in Scotland depends on the appointment of good teachers. Eternal life. Is at stake.

What is taught in the church really matters. It matters because the truth. And only the truth.

Is powerful to transform. Beware the walls. Listen to good teachers. Let me pray.

[26 : 59] Father thank you for. The clarity of your words. Which. Encourages as well as warns.

Might we be alert. To the sort of deceitful. Empty talking teachers. That we read off here in Titus. And we pray that you would.

Raise up. Men. Who will be good teachers. Who will hold firm to the truth. Because.

The future of the church is at stake. Raise up men who will hold to the truth. Who will instruct.

In truth. And contradict error. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.