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TITUS 1:10-16

¹⁰ For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹ whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. ¹² One of them, 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 giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth. ¹⁵ To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. ¹⁶ They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

As we saw yesterday the main role of the elder/overseer is teaching orthodox doctrine and reproving incorrect doctrine. "Titus 1:9: holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict."

The need for this instructional role is outlined in today's verses: There were false teachers – some merely "idle talkers" and other much more malicious "deceivers" who found the low character of Cretan society at that stage (liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons) meant that people were an easy mark for their scams which ultimately ended up with financial advantage and dishonest gain. These false teachers were primarily Jewish "from the circumcision" and propagated "Jewish fables and commandments of men" and turned people aside from the truth. Titus was told that the task was imperative - "their mouths must be stopped" and he is instructed to "rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith."

This role is known as "apologetics" – making a defense for the faith against error and the people who are skilled at this are called "apologists". The title is from the Greek word "apologia" which means to give a verbal defence, a speech in defence or a reasoned statement or argument. Titus and the elders were to be skilled in apologetics that they may refute cults and false teachers and so keep the faith of the early Christian communities on track.

The phrase "who subvert whole households" (the Gk. is *oikos* – houses) probably refers to house-churches which were lead astray by these false teachers. It is not unlike today when cell groups and bible studies can be taken over by a powerful personality with divisive views.

Satan tends to be fairly repetitive in his methods and uses corrupt men to corrupt others. The pure in heart seem to automatically grasp what is right - but there are others, who Paul calls "defiled and unbelieving", and it is difficult for them to arrive at the truth. "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled."

If you have ever tried to reason with a seasoned heretic you will be amazed at how difficult it is for them to see logic or to grasp the truth. You can pile up the evidence and all they can do is scorn it. They do not really seek after truth but after followers, money and notoriety. In 1 Timothy Paul describes them as “Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Timothy 4:2)

The elders had a role – either change their teaching or stop their teaching. They were first to admonish such a person and then, if after two admonitions the person is refractory then they are to be “rejected” that is expelled from the Christian community: “Titus 3:10-11 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.”

At first glance this is not a kind or gracious approach but even Jesus calls such people “wolves” and is firm with the Jewish legalists of His time. Heresy is serious. It does not justify physical assault or burning someone at the stake but it does mean that such a person should not be part of a Christian fellowship.

For both Jesus and Paul the prime mark of a heretic was hypocrisy: “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.” They are abominable – that is engaged in abominations; they are disobedient to the precepts of the gospel; and they are disqualified that is “adokimos” that is: Not standing the test, not approved - properly used of metals and coins; that which does not prove itself such as it ought, unfit for, unproved, spurious, reprobate . In other words they are fakes –once their good works are closely inspected they are as bogus as those of some dubious charities.

Fake good deeds, lies, disobedience, greed for dishonest gain, lies, flattery – it’s a toxic brew that is still around today in various “shonky” ministries that prey on people. Responsible church leaders will bring these people to account, expose them and teach their flock not to be ensnared by them.

We also need to add a caveat – not everyone who disagrees with us is a heretic. Christians can have major doctrinal differences but still be Christ-like, honest, sincere, godly and just. Paul isn’t concerned about views of predestination or tongues here - we need to tolerate significant doctrinal differences among born-again, bible-believing Christians. Inter-denominational mission agencies have proved that Calvinists, Arminians, Pentecostals and Baptists can all work together for the Lord.

We are not to ask elders to berate everyone who has a doctrinal difference from us, we are to ask them to defend the faith from predators, con-artists, divisive and greedy people and those who distort the core of the gospel. Paul is mainly concerned about views on morality, lifestyle and the very core of the gospel - such as the resurrection.

Doctrinal purity is more about the quality of our love and our faith in Christ than it is about infralapsarianism or supralapsarianism (I hope I have spelled those words correctly!) and more about how we handle money than how we handle Hebrew adjectives. The role of elders is to teach us how to live out the Sermon On The Mount in the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit and to rebuke those who would seduce us into disobedience or distract us into myths and wrong teaching.

Blessings,

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