



## **Zealous for Good Works: Sound in the Faith: (Titus 1:10-16)**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

Hello, my name is Quin Cools, and I serve as a pastor here at KingsWay. My voice may sound weak as I recover from a cold, but my spirit has been strengthened by my study of this text, and it's my joy to preach the Word of God this morning.

Jesus coined a phrase in the Sermon on the Mount with this famous saying:

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. (Matthew 6:24)

Today's sermon isn't so much about money, but it is about who you serve.

What are you *devoted* to?

DEVOTION, Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the English Language

- The state of being dedicated, consecrated, or solemnly set apart for a particular purpose.
- A solemn attention to the Supreme Being in worship; a yielding of the heart and affections to God...
- Ardent love or affection

This is what the book of Titus is all about. Listen to this good news:

Jesus "Gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:14)

If you have turned from your sin and rested your faith in Christ to save you, this is you: you are set apart for God and devoted to God. But ask yourself: do these words describe your growing relationship with God? (Dedication, consecration, holy affection, ardent love and zeal)



If not, why not?

Ephesians 4:14 says that without growing up into maturity into Christ, we will be “Tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.”

What winds and waves threaten to break up the ship of faith that is your life?

- Some of you in this room have yet to put your faith in Christ for salvation. You’re out to sea without as much as a raft to keep yourself afloat.
- Others of you look back on a single day when you or your children professed faith in Christ, but when you open your eyes and look around, you don’t see yourself leaning the weight of your life on Jesus.
- Many of us are active in helping one another enjoy a growing relationship with God, but we are often unaware of what threatens to make a shipwreck of our faith.

The Lord knows our need, and by His Spirit, he inspired Paul to write this text for us this morning. Let’s come expectantly before His Word that we would be shaped to be more like Jesus.

*O, make your Word a swift Word,  
Passing from the ear to the heart,  
From the heart to the lip and conversation;  
That, as the rain returns not empty,  
So neither may your Word,  
But accomplish that for which it is given. Amen.*

- George Herbert (16th Century Anglican Minister)

## **ROADMAP**

We find ourselves at the end of the first chapter in Titus.

Titus 1:10-16 teaches us to guard against false teaching, embrace godly discipline, and profess the gospel through living faithfully devoted to God.

If you are taking notes, here are three simple headings for our three points:



1. GUARD
2. EMBRACE
3. PROFESS

*Transition: How do we remain sound in the faith?*

**1. We guard against false teaching for the purity of the gospel and the unity of the body of Christ. (verses 10-11)**

The Apostle Paul wrote this short letter to his ministry companion “So that [Titus] might put what remained into order...” in the churches on Crete. (Titus 1:5) Titus’ work was to start with appointing godly pastor-elders to serve as overseers in each local church.

Last week, we sat under the preaching of Titus 1:5-9. Matthew explained the nature and qualifications of a pastor-elder-overseer. How one’s character, marriage, and family life is formed by believing the gospel. And finally, how the primary work of a pastor is this: instructing in sound doctrine. Let’s read this previous verse as the segue into our text this morning:

Verse 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.

Why would Paul not stop at “He may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine”? He adds something: “And also to rebuke those who contradict it.” If “Give instruction” is a positive statement, it seems that giving rebuke is a bit of a negative one. Why does he consider this to be two sides of the same coin for the duty of a pastor? The context of this letter helps us answer this question: What was going on in the churches on the island of Crete? What was the threat they were facing? And why is rebuke given as the biblical response?

Verse 10a: For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers...

Sometimes I am tempted to think that we face challenges the world has never known. Maybe you are tempted to do the same, but when we open our Bible, we are reminded that there is nothing new under the sun. Take sexuality, for example:



- In Abraham's day, the men of Sodom were driven by deviant and violent distortions of sex.
- In Moses' day, the Cannanites offered worship to the goddess Asherah in the form of sexual immorality and prostitution.
- In Paul's day, he had to rebuke the church in Corinth for not following a pattern of discipline as a member was sleeping with his father's wife!

When I read verse 10, I think, "Wait, is Paul talking about Crete in the first century, or is he talking about us today?" "10a For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers..."

- **Insubordinate** – Anti-authority, suspicious of authority, application of American Christianity?
  - Parents | **Ephesians 6:1** Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
  - Government | **Romans 13:1** Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.
  - Pastors | **Hebrews 13:17** Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.
- **Empty Talkers and Deceivers** – Idle, empty, worthless – Leading astray, misleading
  - **James 1:26** If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.
  - **Ephesians 5:6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.
  - **Colossians 2:8** See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

We must be on guard. In fact, Paul enforces the God-ordained pastoral authority to care when he says in verse 11: they must be *silenced*.

What is Paul NOT saying?



- *They must be silenced* is not the same as our modern notion of speaking truth to power
- *The must be silenced* is not the same as our modern notion of cancel culture

What IS Paul saying?

- It's verse 9 in action: pastors 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."
- Pastors are responsible to courageously, directly, and authoritatively respond to false doctrine by appealing to and applying the Word of God.

Why such strong language from Paul? What's at stake? According to verses 10-11, there are two primary concerns for the life of the church. Why must we guard against false teaching?

- A. The purity of the gospel
- B. The unity of the body of Christ

### **A. THE PURITY OF THE GOSPEL**

Verse 10 describes the many voices who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, *especially those of the circumcision party*. Or literally, those of the circumcision.

There were those in the early church who claimed to be Christians yet required adherence to the Torah, the Old Testament law. Specifically speaking, Jewish males under the Old Covenant must be circumcised. Question: should that be a requirement for Christian men under the New Covenant? It was a big question in the early church!

This is an issue Paul (and Titus) are passionate about. Paul is Jewish, Titus is not. In Galatians 2, Paul describes attending the first council of elders in Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. Hear how the purity of the gospel is at stake:

"3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. 4 Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they



might bring us into slavery— 5 to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

Galatians 2:3-5

We must be on guard against anything that would distort the gospel. If we do not hold to the trustworthy word as taught, we lose everything. Paul makes this abundantly clear in Galatians 5 as he addresses the false teaching of circumcision party:

2 Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. 4 You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. 5 For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. 6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. Galatians 5:2-6

Are you passionate about preserving the purity of the gospel? Do you see that your life and the life of a fellow covenant member in this church depends on it?

So, what's at stake? Why must we guard against false teaching?

1. the purity of the gospel
2. the unity of the body of Christ

## **2. THE UNITY OF THE BODY OF CHRIST**

Look at verse 11.

11 They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

Why must the false teachers be silenced? (Or in the original sense of the word, be bridled?). They are teaching for shameful gain. Whether motivated by greed for money or power, these people are choosing to use their position (their moment on the microphone, their posts on social media, their influence within the church) to teach what they ought not teach. That which does not accord with sound doctrine.



And what's the result? Disunity. Paul understands this is upsetting whole families. It's possible this refers to households or perhaps to home churches that have formed on Crete. The emphasis is the same: false teaching is creating fractures in the family, and especially in the household of faith. Some are being led astray, and are leading others in the same way. It's creating division in the family and division in the church.

This is why the ascended King Jesus gave the church shepherds and teachers:

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. **Ephesians 4:11-14**

Are pastors responsible to guard against false teaching? Absolutely. So, if you're not a member of a church, find a healthy local church and commit to biblical membership. Your life in Christ is what's at stake!

But this isn't just something that pastors are responsible for. We, as members, are responsible to guard against false teaching too. Paul says these false teachers are teaching "What they ought not to teach." How would we know what that is?

Praise God for the gift of the Bible, amen?

Truth is definable and knowable. We have been given God's testimony about himself. This book is God's trustworthy revelation. Praise God for His Spirit leading faithful men to record the words of Scripture, for preserving His Word, for the early church leaders who affirmed the inspired canon of Scripture. We too have a standard of doctrine.

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. **2 Timothy 3:16-17**



*Summary: Point 1: We guard against false teaching for the purity of the gospel and the unity of the body of Christ. What do we embrace?*

**2. We embrace godly discipline when we turn from the truth that we may be sound in the faith. (verses 12-14)**

My family traveled to Oregon for Christmas this year to enjoy time with our kids' grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. I asked my mom to consider what words best describe our family. We came up with three ideas:

1. Loud
2. Hard-working
3. Competitive / Winners

Oh, and number 4 we are humble!

I wonder what words describe your family. What about your community of friends? What about your country? Maybe you're like me and you put a generous spin on those descriptors. But Paul doesn't do that when describing the people of Crete. The transition into this next section is a pretty brutal assessment.

Look at verse 12:

12 One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

The Cretans were legendary for their behavior. Apparently, the Cretans were so notorious that the Greeks actually formed a verb "Kkretizein", "To cretize", which means to lie and to cheat; and they had a proverbial phrase, "*Kreitzein pros Kreta*", "To cretize against a Cretan", which meant to match lies with lies, as diamond cuts diamond." (Barclay, William. "Commentary on Titus 1". "William Barclay's Daily Study Bible")

I like to think of myself as...

- Clear-minded, not impatient
- High-functioning, not a workaholic
- Funny, not an attention-seeker





Your sinful heart turns...

- working hard into finding your identity in achievement.
- uses words to gain attention and to overlook or put others down.
- competitiveness into joy-robbing comparison and greed.

Think of your family. What words describe them? What words describe you? Think of you apart from Christ. Paul's testimony is quite the indictment. "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." Apart from Christ, we have a similarly just indictment against us. This is where we meet the grace of God, but it might come to you as a surprise.

Look at verse 13 to see how Titus is to respond:

13 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply

Titus, and the elders appointed in these local churches, are to *rebuke*. Let's be honest: this is not a feel-good category for American Christians. Why? This rebuke is not just a rebuke for the false teachers. They are to be silenced! This pastoral rebuke is for those who turn away from the truth.

Paul writes about this in 2 Timothy 4:

3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. **2 Timothy 4:3-4**

To guard the flock from the wolves, yes, the false teachers must be silenced. But, those who give ear to the false teaching must also be sharply rebuked. If you're going to write a job description for a pastor, it has to include a category for the godly use of authority. Rebuke isn't writing a critique of the President on Twitter. To rebuke or to reprove literally is to tell someone of their fault. Quin, I thought you said this is where we meet the grace of God. It is! To watch over your profession of faith and with the authority to care for your soul. God gives pastors the holy responsibility to:



Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. **2 Timothy 4:2**

Godly rebuke is not punitive. It's restorative. Look again at Titus 1:13:

Therefore rebuke them sharply, THAT they may be sound in the faith

We should expect – even desire – pastors to bring correction. Why? Because God has directed pastors to do so? Yes? Because we are prone to wander? Also yes. But what does the text say? THAT we may be sound in the faith. To be sound in the faith, we need godly rebuke.

Have you ever received godly rebuke from a pastor or fellow Christian appealing to God's Word? If you did, it probably stung. Maybe a lot. It may have been confrontational. It may have caused you hurt, but let me ask you: did you allow the Lord to use it for His intended effect?

Some of us avoid sharp disagreements entirely. Others intensely push back when we are confronted about something. What does godly humility born of the gospel produce in us? It looks a lot less like insubordination, vain talk, and self-deception and a lot more like grace-empowered vulnerability.

Consider how grace meets us in the face of godly discipline:

“Because of the completeness of Christ's authority, the inescapability of his presence and the surety of his promises, we don't have to be afraid of examining our weaknesses and failure. The gospel of his presence, power, and grace frees us from the burden of minimizing or denying reality. The gospel of his presence, power, and grace welcomes us to be the most honest community on earth.” **Paul Tripp, LEAD**

Do you have a category for this? What would a healthy church member look like? What would healthy church leaders look like? If pastors are to lead, feed, provide, and protect the flock of God—if pastors are to equip the saints to be sound in the faith, then we need to respond to godly discipline with humble faith. This is the faith:



“The knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness in hope of eternal life...”  
(Titus 1:1)

Instead of being sound in faith, the Cretans were (verse 14):

~~14~~ not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

You’ll be devoted to something. Cretans were vulnerable. What about us? As Americans, we love our independence, so we often resist authority. We love our freedom of speech, so we often use our words to communicate values we have not weighed in light of God’s Word. We love our inalienable right to pursue happiness, so we will spend our days scrolling and our evenings with entertainment. I wonder if we use patriotic language to cover up a heart that wanders from the truth. We should be more self-suspecting.

We listen to voices all day long. I wonder how many minutes of our day are filled with hearing voices that either help us follow Jesus or turn us away from the truth.

Consider all the voices you hear through...

- Music
- Books
- Conversations
- Social media
- Radio and TV programs
- News media
- Streaming services
- Podcasting

All things are spiritual. These are spiritual influences in your life. Will you be unaffected when you allow a tsunami of worldly content to stimulate our mind and charm our heart?

Well, as long as there is a pastor who preaches a great sermon on Sunday, surely, I am safe. Well, as long as I read my Bible, say my prayers, financially support the church...



There is an inseparable connection between belief and behavior. Whether doctrinal heresies (myths) or the latest self-improvement book (the commands of people), we are easily turned from the truth. The commands of God show us the path of life. Where will the commands of men lead us? We ignore these spiritual threats of influence to our peril and the peril of our brothers and sisters in the faith. So we must be resolved not to simply be compliant with needed correction but to *embrace* it.

Transition: We embrace godly discipline when we turn from the truth that we may be sound in the faith. (verse 12-14) We GUARD, we EMBRACE, and we PROFESS.

### **3. We profess the gospel through living faithfully devoted to God, or we deny God by our faithless works of disobedience. (verses 15-16)**

In all of this talk, Paul hasn't been saying, "Cretans are the worst. Titus, you should find more compliant church members who will follow your teaching. Go find a better church or an easier flock to shepherd." Quite the opposite. Paul is a good shepherd, and he knows how to endure long suffering. He is planting and building churches on Crete out of love for the Cretans. He is eager to see them treasure Christ. He exhorts Titus to equip godly leaders who will preach the Word and cultivate a culture of discipleship in local churches of redeemed people who are zealous for good works. That's all grace.

So, let's think a little longer with Paul about what this salvation by grace through faith produces in the life of a believer. Put differently, how is the life of a Christian any different than that of an unbeliever?

Let's read verse 15:

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.

Do you see the clear distinction here? Paul uses a poetic refrain to contrast between those who are in Christ and those who are not in Christ. Let's consider it together:

To the pure, all things are pure. Let's start here. In the original language, this word *pure* conveys the Old Testament declarations of what was clean vs. unclean or what is pure vs. impure according to the Levitical law. It wasn't just about guilt offerings and



sin offerings, but God made it clear that if His people were to worship Him, they must do so as those who have been cleansed and set apart for He is holy. (P.S. If you're reading through the Bible in a year, you may be up against Leviticus soon, so look for this: the Lord who is holy, made a way for an unholy people to commune with him. Amazing!

So, who is Paul talking about when he refers to 'The pure'? David asks it this way in Psalm 24: Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. Psalm 24:3-4

David says the clean and the pure shall ascend the hill of the Lord. Jesus doubles down on this, teaching on a hillside, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God! Matthew 5:8

Who are the pure? Not us! Not me. Not you. Apart from Christ, you are not pure, clean, righteous, or holy. We are but beggars on the doorstep of God's mercy. And it's in that posture of humility and desperation before God, that he meets us with his arms of everlasting grace.

Jesus is the radiant one who ascended the hill of the Lord. He is the pure one who was defiled by our sin for our salvation. His arms of everlasting grace were stretched wide on the cross of calvary so that as his crimson blood flowed, our ragged garments would be washed white as snow.

he poured out his soul to death  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
and makes intercession for the transgressors. **Isaiah 53:12b**

- Do you believe Christ died?
- Do you believe he bore the sin of many?
- Do you believe he bore your sin?
- All your sin?
- All the righteous wrath incurred because of your sin?



- More than that, do you believe He was raised to new life, proving to be the conqueror of sin and death?
- Do you believe He reigns and stands to make intercession for you?
- Do you believe your life is found in Christ?
- Do you believe you are being sanctified by the Spirit?
- Do you believe Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness?
- Do you believe Christ gave himself for us to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works?

So, who are the pure? Those who are made pure by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for the glory of God alone. We are sanctified and continually being sanctified. Thus, Paul says, to the pure all things are pure. This is not to say, once saved always saved. Rather, it is to say that the Lord is actively helping us to apply godly wisdom through the indwelling Holy Spirit. He turns our affections from the things of this world to the things of God. He helps us to live well-integrated lives that align with His moral character. He helps us to make wise decisions in areas needing great discernment. He helps us hold the faith with a good conscience and grow into maturity.

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.

There are only two kinds of people, and Paul leaves no question as to the state of the unbelieving. Their minds (rational faculty) are defiled. Their consciences (moral discernment) are defiled. Instead of relying on the infinite wisdom of God, unbelievers trust themselves.

Paul writes, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” **1 Corinthians 2:14**

Our conscience bears witness against us. To the unbelieving person, *nothing* is pure. If you’re a grandmother, it may be hard to consider that apart from faith in Christ, this describes your grandchildren. If you’re a mother with young children, it may be easier to acknowledge that!



The prophet Isaiah affirms this sobering reality:

All of us have become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;  
we all shrivel up like a leaf,  
and like the wind our sins sweep us away. **Isaiah 64:6 NIV**

Apart from Christ, we are unclean, defiled, impure.

Verse 16 drives this home:

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

Think about this: Paul isn't primarily talking about those outside the church. He's talking about those inside the church, those who have made a profession of faith. They attend church on Sundays, contribute to the offering basket, say their prayers before meals and bedtimes, and affirm the statement of faith. *They profess to know God.* But what is the test of a genuine profession?

Jesus says it this way in the Sermon on the Mount:

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" **Matthew 7:21-23**

So, Jesus has an active category for people who are self-deceived, who profess to know God, but they deny him by their works.

Let's get personal. Have you made a profession of faith? If you have, how do we know (to the best of our ability) that it is genuine? Titus 1:16 affirms what Jesus taught in his sermon, that our works either confirm the presence of genuine faith, or deny God. Our works are either born out of obedient faith or they deny the gospel.



Consider three possible motivations someone might have for doing good works.

- Works produced by legalism
- Works produced by license
- Works produced by gospel zeal

Abiding:

- Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. **2 John 1:9**
- For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. **Ephesians 2:10**
- All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

Not abiding:

- Such people are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.

Summary: We profess the gospel through living faithfully devoted to God, or we deny God by our faithless works of disobedience. (verse 15-16)

## CONCLUSION

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

What are you *devoted* to?

### DEVOTION

- The state of being dedicated, consecrated, or solemnly set apart for a particular purpose.
- A solemn attention to the Supreme Being in worship; a yielding of the heart and affections to God...
- Ardent love or affection

Titus 1:10-16 teaches us to guard against false teaching, embrace godly discipline, and profess the gospel through living faithfully devoted to God.





**Let's pray:**

- A - We praise you for your redeeming grace which purifies a people who are set apart
- C - We confess we are prone to wander from the truth and we often fail to guard the purity of the gospel, the unity of the church, and submit to godly authority
- T - Thank you for the purity of the gospel, the unity of our church, godly leadership
- S - Help us to embrace godly discipline that we may be sound in the faith and faithfully profess the gospel through our good works