

Doctrine Works: The Danger of False Teaching

Titus 1:10-2:1

If you open to almost any book in the NT outside the gospels you will discover that the NT church dealt with false teaching a lot. Paul is like a master gardener who constantly must instruct his pupils on how to get rid of harmful insects. He is continually writing to churches to avoid false teaching and he instructs them specifically in how the teaching is wrong and how the good news of the gospel is true.

There are even entire books of the NT that are written to deal primarily with false teaching. Books like 2 Peter and Jude. I think sometimes we may think of false teaching as a more academic contest where we use reason and argumentation to refute opponents and win the day intellectually. The consistent testimony of the NT writers is that false teaching is not just getting the wrong definition of the Trinity or mis-diagnosing the divinity of Christ. False teaching poses as the truth but brings with it corruption and moral defilement. Wrong ways of living come with false teaching like a fever comes with the flu. You don't have one without the other.

Paul understood this acutely and he called on Titus to appoint elders in every church to specifically guard against false teaching infiltrating these blossoming assemblies. We saw last week in Titus 1:5 that Paul gave Titus the task of putting churches in order and appointing qualified elders in each church. Then in 1:9 he tells Titus that elders must have the ability to teach healthy or sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict biblical instruction. Elders are to be like sheep dogs who keep the wolves at bay for the well-being of the sheep.

False teaching doesn't just mean you believe the wrong things. It will change the way you live. It will re-orient your life toward a different end than the glory of God and so it must be rejected.

I think the warning of Paul in verses 10-16 is particularly important for us today. Why? In our culture the flow of information washes over us like a river flooding its banks. We have access to all kinds of teaching online. People recommend articles, books, seminars, sermons, and podcasts to us all the time. In Titus's day false teaching walked into the assembly as a winsome individual. Today it comes

through a Facebook post or a well marketed Christian best seller. We must be cautious and discerning because false teaching will alter lifestyle. So, let's listen carefully to Paul's warning here and heed his instruction. In this passage we will see **3 dangers of false teaching and how to deal with it in the church.**

1. Turmoil (vs. 10-11)

Look with me at verse 10, which clearly connects to the requirement of elders in verse 9. Last week we saw the importance of godly, qualified men to lead the church and teach sound doctrine. **This week we see the opposite side of the coin.** There will always be false teaching and corrupt men who try to influence and damage the church. **Listen to a couple of other places in Scripture where this is described.** 2 Peter 2:1-3 and Acts 20:28-30.

Paul lists some of the primary qualities of these false teachers and then gives us a hint as to who these people are in verse 10. Look at their character qualities. They are insubordinate to God's law. This is the same word used in verse 6 to describe rebellious children. They do not place themselves under God's Word but instead think they know best. They love to hear themselves talk but to no real point or benefit and they ultimately deceive those whom they influence. At the end of verse 11 it even says that their motivation is greed. They are using people to try to make a buck.

What exactly are they teaching? We don't know for certain but they at least seem to believe that even after Jesus, Gentiles must be circumcised or they can't be saved. Look at the end of verse 10. **This was a very common teaching that Paul dealt with and it makes sense here that Titus would be the target of something like this, because he is a Gentile.** The idea would be that the particulars of the OT law are necessary for Gentiles. In reality, Jesus came as the fulfillment of the OT law and so we are not required to follow these mandates to be a part of the New Covenant. This covenant comes to us through the finished and complete work of Jesus Christ.

Paul makes it clear that the way to deal with this sort of false teaching is to silence it. Look at verse 11. Keep the context in mind. You have these infant churches, just installing their first official elders, and these hucksters come in causing turmoil. **Titus is not to allow this to stand.** The picture is to bridle or muzzle these teachers. Of course, Paul doesn't mean to physically muzzle them, but to clearly

articulate from God's Word the nature of the truth and to show why their teaching is wrong.

And this brings us to the devastating result of bad doctrine run amok in the church. Look at the rest of verse 11. It causes turmoil. The idea is that families were being turned upside down through this bad teaching. Things got confusing for people.

Keep in mind that elders are to teach what accords with sound doctrine. There is a beauty, wholeness, and healthiness to biblical instruction. It brings security, peace, and a firm foundation in life's storms. It brings integrity and honesty. False teaching is like being caught in a sail boat during a windstorm. It's unsettling and causes turmoil. It casts doubt on the clear teaching of God's Word and the finished work of Christ. Not only does it cause turmoil, but bad doctrine brings corruption.

2. Corruption (vs. 12-15)

It's at this point that Paul makes a bit of a shift. He turns from describing the false teachers in verses 10-11 to dealing directly with those in the church who are being carried away to follow them. He starts this out with an interesting tactic. He addresses the broader cultural and societal tendencies of the people of Crete. This helps to show why these corrupt false teachers have found a hearing. Look at verse 12.

Sin affects each of us individually, but when we live, work, and play together our communal lives create patterns of sin. We are not born a blank slate, we are born sinful, but growing up in a particular culture means there are certain sin patterns that are more "normalized" in that culture. The culture reinforces our sinful tendencies and we don't even notice them after a while.

In the US we drive on the right side of the road and in Asia they drive on the left side of the road. My guess is that no one in here woke up this morning questioning or even noticing that our driving patterns are unique. I was talking to a missionary recently who has been in Africa, the Middle East, and in China over the last 20 years. He said on the spectrum ranging from most individualistic to most community focused, America is on the very far end of individualism. This is the cultural air we breathe.

The Cretans had certain cultural tendencies that allowed this false teaching to take root in their hearts and bring corruption. Lying was common, almost revered. People were driven by instinct and base desires, and they sought pleasure and comfort to the point of avoiding work and indulging in too much food. When put together these characteristics describe a person who has no self-control and is not disciplined of mind to engage in the hard work of Christian growth.

This certainly describes the false teachers, but Paul probably has in mind the people in the church who were tempted to follow along. So, how should the church handle those tempted to follow these false teachers? Look at verse 13.

This doesn't mean to say, "Hey stupid, stop believing those lies." It means to sternly, but patiently explain why this false teaching is wrong and the impact it is causing. The ultimate goal of this rebuke is that people would turn from the wrong, corrupting teaching and embrace sound doctrine. Look at verse 14.

Embracing sound doctrine means not getting caught up in these myths or commands. Both are extrabiblical stories or commands that the false teachers were using in their instruction. They were probably taking some tiny detail of a genealogy and spinning a story from it not given in the text. They were also giving the people commands not given in Scripture that go beyond the text of Scripture or misapply God's Word.

People outside the church will often think of any sort of rebuke or denunciation of wrong thinking or teaching as judgmental. Certainly, we must be careful of our tone and our motivation, but when used properly and with the right goal of growth in faith, rebuke is a tool to be used for God's glory and the good of others.

Now, these commands mentioned in verse 14 are probably similar to the ones mentioned in 1 Timothy 4:1-5. The false teachers were probably telling these Christians that to be clean or pure they needed to avoid marriage and certain foods. Paul says that it's not a matter of ritual cleanness, it's actually a matter of the heart. Look at verse 15.

The point is similar to 1 Timothy 4:4. Purity doesn't come through avoiding certain foods or other extrabiblical commands. It comes through the work of Jesus Christ. Those who are made pure by Christ are set free to enjoy the physical world and the gifts of God. But those who follow these false teaching and have been set on

the wrong set of tracks are already corrupt in mind and conscience. They will misunderstand God's gifts and misapply God's Word.

You can see here that a proper understanding of the gospel impacts how we go through life and our actions relating to even minor things like food. But a wrong understanding that comes from corrupt instruction will only add further corruption. It will only widen the gap between our profession of a relationship with God and our lifestyle. And this leads to our last danger.

3. Hypocrisy (vs. 16-2:1)

Sound doctrine brings together my thinking and acting with the reality of God's rule and reign in the world. False teaching splinters and this brings hypocrisy. Look at verse 16.

There's a verbal profession, but a functional denial. This is like the man who claims to love his wife and cultivates an affair while on a business trip. Think about what hypocrisy is at the core. It's a divergence between my words and lifestyle. It's a splitting of actions and my perceived beliefs.

Maybe a helpful way of understanding this would be to say that we all have a functional theology. Everyone has certain beliefs about God, the gospel, sin and eternity that really change the way we live. This is our functional theology. Most people in this room affirm something very similar verbally. If I ask if Jesus Christ is Lord, nearly everyone will say, yes. But my actions can show that my functional theology betrays a different belief. Your functional theology governs how you respond when tragedy strikes. Your functional theology is almost never articulated verbally, but actually guides the course of your life. Think of your functionally theology as the engine and your verbal theology as the label on the outside of your car. We want those to match.

But false teaching creates a schism between profession and action. Why? Because there is an inherent connection between what you believe and what you do. Not what you SAY you believe, but your functional theology. Let me show you how Jesus talks about this schism in the Sermon on the Mount.

Turn over to Matthew 6. Look at verse 2. Jesus is not arguing here that you don't need to give to the needy, he assumes that we will give. This is one of the key religious practices. But, you can do this in a way where your practice of it doesn't

match the intended goal of the action. The hypocrites give in order to get men's approbation. But giving is a practice intended to be done to honor God and help men, not to earn approval from others. **This is a case of hypocrisy because the motivation for performing the action doesn't match the goal of the action.** In Matthew the problem is the motivation but in Titus it's the actions. **They don't match the profession.** God's assessment of hypocrisy is not to be envied. Look back at Titus 1:16.

So, what should the church do to counteract the hypocrisy that false teaching encourages? Look at 2:1. **This is the core of the book.** Notice here he says sound doctrine again. It's doctrine that produces healthy living. It's doctrine that brings the outside to match the inside. **Paul is telling Titus to feed people their vegetables.**

Now, I want you to think for a minute about the experience of walking into the grocery store and the sheer plethora of food options at your fingertips. There's never been anything like this in human history. You can fill your shopping cart with the healthiest foods imaginable. Raspberries, apples, cantaloupe, romaine lettuce, beets, kale, and the list goes on.

But have you seen some of the other options in that same grocery store? I cannot go to Meijer without getting sucked into the aisle housing the potato chips. I am a potato chip addict. Have you seen the ice cream options at your fingertips? Mint chocolate chip, cookie dough, mackinac island fudge, even the vanilla is good and you can put sanders hot fudge on any of it.

Certain types of food lead to healthy living and other foods don't. **It works in the exact same way with the teaching and instruction we take in.** Remember, the phrase sound doctrine means healthy doctrine and it's the sort of instruction that accurately portrays the Bible and applies God's Word to life. **It's the sort of teaching that leads to action.** To perform at a high-level, athletes must carefully manage their diets. In order to grow in Christlikeness, we must be taking in truly biblical teaching.

But as this passage has shown us, unhealthy teaching, or false teaching leads to corruption and disobedience. And just like we have so many options in front of us regarding physical food, we have access to all sorts of spiritual junk food. But let me exhort you to give yourself to sound doctrine. Don't be the sort of Christian

who says, that doctrine stuff doesn't really matter, we're just supposed to love God and love others. Really? Who is God? What does it mean to love him? How do we love others? The answers to all of those questions are doctrine and your answer can be sound doctrine or false teaching. Develop healthy doctrinal eating habits and reject false teaching.