

The Books of Titus, Philemon, and Jude, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 2: Rebuking False Teachers

Titus 1:10–16

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson is largely about discernment, and what is doctrinally at stake is the difference between true and false teaching, and between a professed faith and a saving one. Paul does not treat doctrinal error as a matter of taste. False teaching upsets households, springs from corrupt motives, and ultimately reveals hearts that deny God even while professing Him. The teacher should help students take error seriously without becoming paranoid, learning to test teaching by its fidelity to the apostolic word and by the fruit it produces.

The climactic concern of the passage is the relationship between faith and works. Verse 16 is one of the clearest statements in Scripture that a profession of faith contradicted by one's life is worthless. This is fertile ground to reinforce that saving faith is a living, obedient faith, never mere words or mental assent, and to do so without tipping into a works-merit error. We are saved by grace through a faith that actually trusts and obeys, and a faith that changes nothing was never the faith of the gospel.

The formational aim, then, is twofold. First, sharpen students' discernment so they can recognize and resist teaching that serves self rather than Christ. Second, and more searchingly, turn the passage inward so that each student examines whether his or her own works confess the same Lord the lips profess. The goal is a church that is both protected from error and honest about itself.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul describes the false teachers as “insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party” (v. 10). What do these descriptions reveal about the nature of false teaching, and why does Paul treat it as a serious threat to the church rather than a minor disagreement?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Help students hear the weight of Paul's terms. “Insubordinate” means unwilling to submit to legitimate authority, in this case the apostolic truth. “Empty talkers” describes people whose teaching is impressive in volume and hollow in substance. “Deceivers” names the effect: people are actually led astray. Paul is not describing sincere people who simply see things differently; he is describing a real and harmful movement.

Note the specific group Paul highlights, “those of the circumcision party,” Jewish-background teachers insisting on the old law’s external requirements. This connects to a battle Paul fought everywhere, the temptation to add law-keeping to the gospel of grace. The error was not new immorality but a corruption of the gospel itself, which is why Paul takes it so seriously.

Press the point that doctrine matters because people matter. Paul treats false teaching as a serious threat precisely because souls and households are at risk. A church that shrugs at error in the name of being agreeable has misunderstood love. The teacher should model taking truth seriously while keeping the focus on protecting people, not winning turf.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The seriousness of doctrinal error as a threat to souls, not a matter of preference
- The recurring danger of adding law-keeping to the gospel of grace (the circumcision party)
- Discernment as a mark of maturity (Hebrews 5:14)
- Distinguishing genuine error from mere differences of personality or style

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it loving, not unkind, to take false teaching seriously?
- What makes “empty talk” attractive even when it lacks real substance?
- How can we be discerning without becoming suspicious of everyone?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul says these men were “upsetting whole families” (v. 11). Think about the influences you invite into your home, whether through media, friendships, or teachers. Which of these is genuinely building your household up in Christ, and is there one you need to examine more carefully or turn away from?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question moves the danger from the abstract to the doorstep. Paul says whole families were being upset. Invite students to consider the influences that actually shape their households day by day: the voices they listen to, the content they consume, the friendships that set the tone.

Be careful to keep this constructive rather than fearful. The goal is not to retreat into suspicion of everything outside the church, but to take responsibility for what we welcome in. Some influences quietly build faith; others quietly erode it. Most of us have simply never paused to ask which is which.

Encourage one concrete act of discernment. Perhaps it is examining a steady media diet, or a friendship that consistently pulls toward cynicism, or a teacher whose message subtly flatters rather than forms. The aim is one honest evaluation and, where needed, one humble change.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Stewardship of the influences we welcome into our homes
- The household as a place to be guarded and built up in Christ
- Discernment applied personally, not just to public teachers
- The difference between healthy engagement and uncritical absorption

Discussion Prompts

- What influences most shape the spiritual tone of your home?
- How can you tell whether an influence is building faith or eroding it?
- What is one influence you may need to examine more carefully this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul tells Titus that these mouths “must be silenced” because they teach “for shameful gain” (v. 11). What does it mean to silence false teaching in a way that fits the gospel, and what does the motive of “shameful gain” warn us about when money and ministry get tangled together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Address the strong command first: these mouths “must be silenced.” In context this means the false teachers were not to be given a platform in the church, and their errors were to be answered and stopped, not by violence but by sound teaching, faithful leadership, and, where necessary, the withdrawal of fellowship. Connect this to the elder’s task in verse 9 of refuting those who contradict.

Then examine the motive Paul exposes: “shameful gain.” The false teachers had discovered that religion could be lucrative. This is a perennial danger whenever ministry and money mix. Paul himself often worked with his hands to avoid any appearance of profiteering (1 Thessalonians 2:5–9). The teacher should help students see how the love of money corrupts teaching, tempting people to say what pays rather than what is true.

Balance the discussion so students do not conclude that money in ministry is always corrupt; Scripture also says the laborer deserves his wages (1 Timothy 5:17–18). The issue is the heart’s motive. When gain drives the message, the message bends. When Christ drives the message, the truth stands even when it costs.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Silencing error through sound teaching and faithful discipline, not coercion
- The love of money as a corrupter of doctrine (1 Timothy 6:5–10)
- The legitimacy of supporting faithful teachers, distinguished from greed (1 Timothy 5:17–18)
- The motive of the heart as the key issue in teaching

Discussion Prompts

- What does it look like to silence error in a way that honors the gospel?
- How does the love of money subtly shape what gets taught?
- How can a church support its teachers while guarding against greed?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul quotes a Cretan poet who admitted that his own people were “always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons” (v. 12), and he agrees the testimony is true. It is easy to see faults in others; it is harder to see our own. What is one cultural sin you have absorbed almost without noticing, simply because it is normal where you live?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question uses Paul’s blunt quotation of the Cretan poet to turn the spotlight on cultural sin. Paul agrees that the description of Cretan vices is true, not to insult them, but to be realistic about the spiritual environment. Every culture has its characteristic sins, and the most dangerous ones are the ones we no longer notice because everyone around us shares them.

Help students name the cultural air they breathe. It might be greed dressed up as ambition, sexual permissiveness treated as freedom, cynicism mistaken for intelligence, or busyness worn as a badge of honor. The point is not to despair of one’s culture but to recognize that we absorb its sins without choosing them.

Move toward humility and repentance. The gospel does not flatter any culture, including our own, and it does not flatter us. Inviting the Lord to expose a cultural sin we have absorbed is an act of trust, not self-hatred. Ask students to name one and to bring it honestly before God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reality of cultural sins absorbed without conscious choice
- The gospel’s refusal to flatter any culture, including our own
- Self-examination that includes the corporate and cultural, not just the individual
- Repentance as turning from sins we had stopped noticing

Discussion Prompts

- What sins are so normal in our culture that we barely notice them?
- How does the gospel challenge our culture rather than baptize it?
- What cultural sin do you sense the Lord exposing in you?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul says he confronts these errors “that they may be sound in the faith” (v. 13). What does this tell us about the real goal of rebuke and correction in the church, and how does that goal differ from merely winning an argument or shaming an opponent?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Anchor the discussion in Paul’s stated purpose: “rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (v. 13). The end goal of even sharp rebuke is restoration to soundness, not destruction. This reframes the entire passage. Paul is not venting; he is healing. The sharpness serves the soundness.

Contrast this with the way correction often goes wrong. We rebuke to win, to vent, to establish dominance, or to feel righteous. Paul rebukes so that people might be made whole in the faith. Galatians 6:1 strikes the same note: restore a brother caught in sin gently, watching yourself. The aim is always recovery.

Help students hold sharpness and love together rather than treating them as opposites. Sometimes love must be firm, even severe, precisely because the stakes are high. But its aim is never the harm of the other person. The teacher can model this tone in the very way the lesson is taught.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Restoration, not destruction, as the goal of rebuke (Galatians 6:1)
- Soundness in the faith as the target of correction
- The compatibility of firmness and love
- Church discipline as a redemptive, not merely punitive, act

Discussion Prompts

- What changes when the goal of correction is healing rather than winning?
- How can rebuke be both sharp and loving at the same time?
- When has firm correction actually helped you grow?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul commands a sharp rebuke so that people might be restored to soundness, not destroyed. When you have to confront someone, or be confronted yourself, what is usually going on in your heart? How is Christ teaching you to give and receive correction in a way that aims at healing rather than wounding?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to look honestly at their own hearts in the act of giving and receiving correction. Most of us are bad at both. We give correction defensively or harshly, and we receive it with bruised pride. Invite candid reflection on which is harder.

Point to the inner posture Scripture commends: humility, gentleness, and a genuine desire for the other person's good when correcting; teachability and openness when corrected. Proverbs repeatedly says the wise person loves correction and the fool resents it. Our reaction to rebuke reveals a great deal about our hearts.

Encourage one practical commitment. Perhaps it is choosing to receive the next piece of criticism without defending yourself first, or approaching a needed conversation with prayer and gentleness rather than dread or aggression. Christ, the perfect blend of grace and truth, is the model and the power for both.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Humility and teachability in receiving correction (Proverbs 9:8–9)
- Gentleness and love in giving correction
- Pride as the great obstacle to growth through rebuke
- Christ as both model and source of grace and truth

Discussion Prompts

- Is it harder for you to give correction or to receive it? Why?
- What does your reaction to criticism reveal about your heart?
- What is one way you can grow in giving or receiving correction this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul warns against “Jewish myths” and “the commands of people who turn away from the truth” (v. 14), and he says, “To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure” (v. 15). What is Paul teaching here about the source of real defilement, and how does this expose the emptiness of a religion built on man-made rules?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Unpack Paul's contrast in verse 15: "To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; their minds and consciences are defiled." The false teachers were obsessed with external rules, ceremonial purity, food laws, man-made commandments. Paul says they had the problem backwards. Defilement is not finally about external things; it flows from the heart.

Connect this to Jesus' own teaching in Mark 7:14–23, that it is not what enters a person from outside that defiles, but what comes out of the heart. A religion built on external rules can leave the heart entirely untouched, even corrupt, while keeping the outside scrubbed clean. This is the emptiness Paul exposes.

Be careful to state what Paul is not saying. He is not abolishing all moral standards or saying behavior does not matter; the rest of Titus is full of moral instruction. He is saying that external rule-keeping cannot purify a defiled heart, and that genuine purity is an inside-out work of God through the gospel, not an outside-in achievement through human commands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Defilement as a matter of the heart, not external things (Mark 7:14–23)
- The emptiness of man-made rules to produce real holiness (Colossians 2:20–23)
- Purity as an inside-out work of God, not an outside-in human achievement
- The corrupted conscience as the true source of impurity

Discussion Prompts

- Why can external rule-keeping leave the heart untouched?
- How does Jesus locate the real source of defilement?
- What is the difference between God's moral commands and mere man-made rules?

Question 8

Student Question:

Verse 15 says the problem is finally in the heart and conscience, not in external things. Where are you tempted to measure your spiritual health by external markers, things you avoid, boxes you check, appearances you keep, while neglecting the actual condition of your heart before God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses verse 15 into the conscience. We are all tempted to measure our spiritual health by externals, what we avoid, what we attend, how we appear, because externals are visible and manageable. The heart is harder to assess and harder to control.

Help students see the subtlety of this temptation. A person can have an impressive list of things they do not do and still harbor pride, bitterness, or coldness toward God. The outside can pass

inspection while the inside slowly hardens. Paul's words are a summons to honest interior attention.

Guide the group toward the remedy, which is not less attention to obedience but deeper attention to the heart from which obedience flows. Invite each student to name one area where they have been content with appearances and to ask God to work on the heart beneath it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The temptation to measure spiritual health by external markers
- The heart as the true field of sanctification
- Hypocrisy as a clean exterior over an unattended interior
- Obedience flowing from a transformed heart, not replacing it

Discussion Prompts

- What external markers are you tempted to trust as proof of spiritual health?
- How can we attend to the heart and not just to behavior?
- Where might appearances be masking something God wants to address?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul's verdict on the false teachers is devastating: "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work" (v. 16). What does this passage teach about the relationship between genuine faith and obedient works, and why does a faith that leaves the life unchanged fail to be saving faith at all?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it centers on verse 16: "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work." Here Scripture states plainly that a profession of faith can be contradicted, and effectively nullified, by one's works. The teacher should let this verse do its full work.

Use this to teach the biblical relationship between faith and works clearly. Saving faith is never mere verbal profession or intellectual agreement; it is a living trust that obeys. James says faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26). Jesus said not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom, but the one who does the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21). The false teachers in Crete are a living example: their lips said one thing, their lives another, and their lives told the truth.

Be precise so as not to swing into a works-merit error. The point is not that we earn salvation by good works, nor that we are saved by faith plus a separate ledger of merits. The point is that genuine, saving faith is the kind of faith that obeys; it expresses itself in repentance, confession,

baptism into Christ, and a transformed life. A faith that produces none of this is not weak faith; it is, as Paul says here, a denial of God dressed in religious words. This is the consistent New Testament alternative both to salvation by works and to a bare faith-only that leaves the life unchanged.

Bring it home pastorally. This verse is not meant to make sincere, struggling believers despair; growth and failure are part of every Christian life. It is meant to confront the person whose religion is all talk and no surrender. Help students examine themselves honestly, neither presuming on a profession that has never touched their conduct nor doubting a real faith simply because it is still maturing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saving faith as a living, obedient trust, never mere profession (James 2:14–26)
- The unity of genuine faith and works without slipping into works-merit
- The danger of self-deception in a profession contradicted by life (Matthew 7:21–23)
- Obedient faith expressed in repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4)
- Assurance grounded in a faith that actually trusts and obeys, against both faith-only and works-righteousness

Discussion Prompts

- How can a profession of faith actually deny God?
- Why is a faith that changes nothing not the saving faith of the gospel?
- How do we hold together grace and obedience without falling into either error?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these verses. Paul has shown you both a danger to guard against and a mirror to look into, warning against teachers who deny God by their works and asking whether your own life matches your confession. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth from Titus 1:10–16 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone invites students to gather both halves of the lesson, the danger to guard against and the mirror to look into, into one personal takeaway. Resist a generic summary; press for one specific truth and one specific way Christ is at work.

Trace the movement of the passage with the group. Paul began by exposing teachers whose words and works disagreed, and he ended by warning that profession without obedience is a

denial of God. The whole chapter has been moving us toward integrity, toward a faith that is the same on the inside as on the outside.

Close by connecting discernment and self-examination. The same standard by which we test teachers (do their lives match the gospel?) is the standard by which we must test ourselves. Send students home asking not only “whom should I listen to?” but “does my own life confess the Lord my mouth professes?”

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Integrity as the unifying theme: confession and conduct in agreement
- Discernment toward others paired with honesty about oneself
- Personal formation as the aim of studying this passage
- Carrying one specific, applied truth into daily life

Discussion Prompts

- What one truth from this chapter do you most need this week?
- How is God using this passage to align your works with your words?
- How does testing teachers also call you to test yourself?