

The Books of Titus, Philemon, and Jude

Lesson 2: Rebuking False Teachers -- Titus 1:10-16

Every family knows the difference between a guest who blesses the home and a guest who poisons it. One sits at the table, shares the meal, and leaves everyone glad. The other arrives with an agenda, stirs up the children, sets brother against brother, and somehow walks away with the silverware. By the time the door closes, the whole household feels off balance. Paul has just told Titus what a faithful shepherd looks like. Now he turns and points to the people who were doing exactly the opposite in the churches of Crete, the guests who were poisoning the home.

Paul does not mince words. He calls them “insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers” who were “upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach” (vv. 10-11). That phrase, “upsetting whole families,” should stop us. This was not a harmless difference of opinion. Real homes were being turned upside down. Real believers were being unsettled. And the motive underneath it, Paul says, was money. These men had found that religion could be profitable, and they were willing to twist the truth to get paid.

It can feel jarring to find such sharp language in the Bible, especially right after a passage about gentleness and self-control. But love is not always soft. A shepherd who sees a wolf among the sheep does not respond with a polite suggestion. Paul loves the Cretan Christians too much to leave them defenseless, so he names the danger plainly and tells Titus to silence it. There is a kind of toughness that flows directly out of tenderness, and we see it here.

Yet the most searching line in the passage is not about the false teachers out there; it is a warning that can land on any of us. Paul says, “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works” (v. 16). It is possible to have the right words on your lips and a life that contradicts every one of them. As you read these verses, let Paul sharpen your discernment about the voices you let into your life, and let him also turn the light inward, asking whether your own profession and your own works are telling the same story.

Group Discussion: Paul says the false teachers were “upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach” (v. 11). In our day, what are some of the ways that false or self-serving teaching still unsettles believers and even whole families? How can a congregation grounded in sound doctrine protect itself without becoming suspicious and harsh toward everyone?

Personal Reflection: Paul’s most piercing line is, “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works” (v. 16). Set the false teachers aside for a moment and turn that sentence on yourself. Is there any place where your words confess Christ but your daily choices quietly deny Him? What would it take this week to bring your works back into agreement with your profession?

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 7:15-20, recognizing false prophets by their fruit; Acts 20:28-31, fierce wolves arising from within the church; 2 Peter 2:1-3, false teachers exploiting the flock for greed; 1 Timothy 6:3-10, the love of money as a root of departure from the faith; James 2:14-26, faith that is shown to be alive by its works.