

Elders, On Guard!
Titus 1:10-16
ABC 11/22/20

You all know the story of Little Red Riding Hood, right? At least some form of it. Here's the 1697 version:

Once upon a time there lived in a certain village a little country girl, the prettiest creature who was ever seen. Her mother was excessively fond of her; & her grandmother doted on her still more. This good woman had a little red riding hood made for her. It suited the girl so extremely well that everybody called her Little Red Riding Hood.

One day her mother, having made some cakes, said to her, "Go, my dear, & see how your grandmother is doing, for I hear she has been very ill. Take her a cake, & this little pot of butter."

Little Red Riding Hood set out immediately to go to her grandmother, who lived in another village.

As she was going through the wood, she met with a wolf, who had a very great mind to eat her up, but he dared not, because of some woodcutters working nearby in the forest. He asked her where she was going. The poor child, who did not know that it was dangerous to stay & talk to a wolf, said to him, "I am going to see my grandmother & carry her a cake & a little pot of butter from my mother."

"Does she live far off?" said the wolf.

"Oh I say," answered Little Red Riding Hood; "it is beyond that mill you see there, at the first house in the village."

"Well," said the wolf, "& I'll go & see her too. I'll go this way & go you that, & we shall see who will be there first."

The wolf ran as fast as he could, taking the shortest path, & the little girl took a roundabout way, entertaining herself by gathering nuts, running after butterflies, & gathering bouquets of little flowers. It was not long before the wolf arrived at the old woman's house. He knocked at the door: tap, tap.

"Who's there?"

"Your grandchild, Little Red Riding Hood," replied the wolf, counterfeiting her voice; "who has brought you a cake & a little pot of butter sent you by mother."

The good grandmother, who was in bed, because she was somewhat ill, cried out, "Pull the bobbin, & the latch will go up."

The wolf pulled the bobbin, & the door opened, & then he immediately fell upon the good woman & ate her up in a moment, for it been more than three days since he had eaten. He then shut the door & got into the grandmother's bed, expecting Little Red Riding Hood, who came some time afterwards & knocked at the door: tap, tap.

"Who's there?"

Little Red Riding Hood, hearing the big voice of the wolf, was at first afraid; but believing her grandmother had a cold & was hoarse, answered, "It is your grandchild Little Red Riding Hood, who has brought you a cake & a little pot of butter mother sends you."

The wolf cried out to her, softening his voice as much as he could, "Pull the bobbin, & the latch will go up."

Little Red Riding Hood pulled the bobbin, & the door opened.

The wolf, seeing her come in, said to her, hiding himself under the bedclothes, "Put the cake & the little pot of butter upon the stool, & come get into bed with me."

Little Red Riding Hood took off her clothes & got into bed. She was greatly amazed to see how her grandmother looked in her nightclothes, & said to her, "Grandmother, what big arms you have!"

"All the better to hug you with, my dear."

"Grandmother, what big legs you have!"

"All the better to run with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big ears you have!"

"All the better to hear with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big eyes you have!"

"All the better to see with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big teeth you have got!"

"All the better to eat you up with."

And, saying these words, this wicked wolf fell upon Little Red Riding Hood, & ate her all up.

Moral: Children, especially attractive, well-bred young ladies, should never talk to strangers, for if they should do so, they may well provide dinner for a wolf.¹

Brothers Grimm add: *It is also related that once when red-cap was again taking cakes to the old grandmother, another wolf spoke to her, & tried to entice her from the path. Red-cap, however, was on her guard...*²

The website, YouAreMom.com, gives this fairy tale these morals:

1. Don't trust strangers
2. Don't share personal information
3. Don't disobey your parents
4. Don't lower one's guard.³

¹ Charles Perrault, (1628-1703) www.pitt.edu/~dash/perrault02.html

² (1785-1863) www.cs.cmu.edu/~spok/grimtmp/020.txt

³ <https://youaremom.com/children/little-red-riding-hood/>

If you're not on guard, always vigilant, you can get yourself in serious trouble. Being on guard can keep you from flirting dangerously with those who want to destroy you. As Christians, we must take this lesson to heart. Many wolves in sheep's clothing prey upon God's flock. False teachers often use the Bible, seem like nice people, & are kind & loving. But they'll deceive & destroy you. There are many examples of this throughout history & still around today. Joel Osteen is one of many false teachers who promote the dangerous myth of the prosperity gospel. His message is a *theology not centered on God & His glory, but an anthropocentric psychological message aimed at making individuals merely feel better about themselves.*⁴ His false teaching is that the gospel is about overcoming bad times by thinking happy thoughts & not about how Christ overcame sin & death on our behalf. He falsely teaches that if we'll remove all forms of negativity from our lives & focus only on positive things, then we can live lives that are victorious & successful. The clear problem with this message is it ignores the reality of Christian persecution & suffering.⁵ He peddles the myth of moral therapy; that by changing your lifestyle you'll receive God's favor & happiness here & now & it's up to you to make it happen. He's only one of many false teachers who profess to know God, but by their words & works, they deny Him, & their message is deceitful & destructive. Satan has always been active in raising up false teachers to oppose God's truth. It was happening in Crete, where there were **many** deceivers (10). Because Satan is so active in promoting destructive heresies, elders must be godly men of the Word who vigilantly guard the flock. In our text in Titus 1, Paul shows that elders must guard the flock by refuting false teachers & by correcting believers who've followed their teaching. Let's read vs 5-16. What are elders to be like?

5-8

What are elders to be doing? **9**

Why do we need elders? **10-16**

Here we see that false teachers are known 1st by their...

⁴ Albert Mohler, [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-kanye-should-know-about-joel-osteen/](http://thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-kanye-should-know-about-joel-osteen/)

⁵ Adan Blosser, https://fredericksburg.com/opinion/columns/column-why-i-call-joel-osteen-a-false-teacher/article_a59a16b1-f7d9-54d3-985e-f504c52fc1f1.html

1. Wrong Words Paul has just identified the need for elders to **encourage others by sound doctrine & refute those who oppose it** (9). Now he says why this is necessary. **10a**

The word **for** connects vs 10 to vs 9 & continues the thought as to why it's so important we hold fast to the faithful word, exhort in sound doctrine, & refute error. Why? **For there are many rebellious men** unwilling to submit to God & His Word. They talk without saying anything. They engage in deceit & lead people away from the gospel. What's the deceit Paul refers to? The reference to these opponents as being of **those of the circumcision** clues us in. Paul uses those types of references (Acts 10:45; 11:2; Gal 2:7–9, 12) to identify former Jews who joined the early church with a *gospel-plus* message. *Yes, they say, what saves you is faith in the work of Christ plus special religious knowledge, diets, rituals, or practices that qualify you for heaven.* This faulty message deceives people into thinking their status with God is determined by their own accomplishments. Paul tells Titus these men must **be silenced** (11). This can mean *controlled* or *muzzled*.⁶ They're spiritual rebels, enemies of God, His truth, & His people. Being a law unto themselves & representing Satan, they don't recognize the authority of God's Word.⁷ Always beware of those who won't put themselves under the authority of a local church because this indicates an unwillingness to be accountable to anyone. While it may not be possible to stop them from talking, it is possible to stop them from spreading their errors within the church. Elders are to guard the teaching within a church & to guard against false teachers infiltrating smaller groups. False teachers love to get into home groups where they can spout their theology & try to lead families or groups astray. The unsound teaching of the circumcision group, Paul says, is **upsetting, ruining, or overturning whole families**. Knowing this false doctrine damages people, Paul is eager for Titus to silence them, which shows his love for God's people. False teaching hurts people because it keeps people from God's truth. Therefore, to confront error is an act of love. If you care about people, you can't let them follow or believe destructive heresies. Our text reveals at least 3 ways elders must refute the wrong words of false teachers:

⁶ R. Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy & Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, p 308

⁷ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Titus*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 57.

A. Teach sound doctrine As Paul wrote, elders must be able to **exhort in sound doctrine** (9). He goes on to tell Titus, **speaking the things which are fitting for sound doctrine** (2:1). Obviously, Paul didn't think we're to downplay theology & doctrine. We must teach & emphasize God's truth. **Sound doctrine** means *healthy doctrine*. It leads to healthy spiritual growth & maturity. If teaching just feeds curiosity or makes you feel good about yourself, it isn't **sound doctrine**. Biblical truth is the weapon that's able to destroy fortresses & speculations & **every lofty thing** that's raised up against the truth of God (2 Cor 10:4-5). Paul says the danger of false gospels is so large that even if he **or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed** (Gal 1:8). Knowing the truth of God's Word makes it easy to spot false teaching that doesn't line up with it. Elders are to teach sound doctrine.

B. Expose false teaching There's a common idea that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere & believe something. But that's nonsense. You can believe with everything you are that you can jump off Pilot Rock & fly. But believing that lie won't help you no matter how much you believe it. It's the same spiritually. Spiritual things are true because God, the God who cannot lie, has revealed them to us in His Word. Other things are spiritually false because they come to us from Satan, the father of lies (Jn 8:44). Paul says these false teachers have turned **away from the truth** (14). This means that spiritual truth is knowable & absolute, not vague or relative. While we don't know the specific errors of these false teachers in Crete, we can surmise they were promoting 3 common errors that needed to be exposed.

1) False teachers add works to salvation These false teachers claimed to believe in Jesus as Messiah & Savior but insisted those who professed faith in Jesus also had to keep the Jewish ceremonial & dietary laws to be saved. For example, they taught a man must have faith & be circumcised to be saved. They wouldn't accept Gentiles into the church on the basis of faith in Christ alone. They must also live like the Jews. As we saw a couple of weeks ago, Paul & Barnabas had trouble with false teachers in Antioch, which led to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. The conclusion reached was that all people, whether Jew or Gentile, are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus through faith, apart from keeping the laws of Moses. But in spite of that decision, some Jews kept promoting that

error. Whenever anything is added to the work of Christ as the basis of our security with God, we're entrusting our souls to our own works. What are some of the works false teachers add to salvation? They might say you have to be christened, confirmed, catechized, or circumcised. Satan always wants to muddle & confuse the Bible's clear teaching on the way of salvation. Most false teaching adds human works to saving faith as a necessary condition for salvation. In addition to faith in Christ, false teachers say you must add your own good deeds, whether baptism, keeping the Sabbath, not eating meat sacrificed to idols, celebrating holidays, or whatever, to merit salvation. But Paul's very clear that we're justified by faith in Christ alone, apart from anything that we contribute (Rom 3:24, 28; Gal 3:6-14). The idea that we have to add something to faith to make it genuine or ourselves worthy always results in arrogance. In the effort to exceed the goodness of others, those who live the gospel-plus doctrine find the need to tear down others in order to build themselves up. Gossip, backbiting, & pride result. Teaching that God loves us because we're better than others, in knowledge or practice, creates bitterness, dissension, & despair. Whole families are thus ruined.

2) False teachers don't focus on Jesus Paul says these rebellious, deceiving, empty talkers paid attention to **Jewish myths** (14). This was probably the same error that Paul refutes in 1 Tim 1:4, where they paid **attention to myths & endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith**. This probably involved bizarre interpretations & stories built around some of the OT genealogies. Paul says it's **mere speculation because** it doesn't further God's kingdom, which centers on faith in Jesus Christ. Every cult from the 1st century onward has erred on the person & work of Jesus. Some say He's God but not human (Docetism). Others insist He's human but not truly divine (Arianism). Many have said He's a great teacher or example, but they deny the necessity of His death as the atonement for our sins. Cults also supplement the Bible with their own writings or traditions, which invariably contradict the Bible & take precedent over it. As Christians, as people of the Book, we must believe in the Bible alone as our authoritative source of truth. & all of Scripture, Old & NTs, centers on the person & work of Jesus Christ, who is the eternal God, who took on human flesh to die as the substitute for

our sins on the cross (Lk 24:25-27, 44-47). Having a right view & a high view of Christ is the best safeguard against error, because it's here that cults & false religions teach things they shouldn't (11), denying Christ's deity or the sufficiency of His work.

3) False teachers promote legalism, not God's grace Paul says these false teachers promoted **the commandments of men** (1:14; cf Col 2:20-23). Legalism emphasizes non-essentials & neglects biblical essentials. Legalism focuses on outward conformity to man-made rules rather than on inward conformity to God's righteous commands given in Scripture. Legalism always appeals to the flesh & pride. It feeds the arrogant human heart that thinks it can attain righteousness apart from being humbled beneath the cross of Christ. Legalists congratulate themselves for doing their religious duties & they self-righteously condemn those who don't do the things they do. But they don't judge the sin in their hearts or seek to please God from the heart. I think that's what vs 15 refers to. **15**

Paul doesn't mean if you think something isn't sinful, then it's OK to do. No, he was referring to the Jewish ceremonial & dietary laws. The false teachers claimed to be pure because they kept these rules, but in God's sight, they were unclean because their minds & consciences were **defiled**. Only the blood of Christ can cleanse our consciences so we can serve God (Heb 9:14; 10:22). Paul's making the same point that Jesus made in Mk 7:15-23, where He accused the Pharisees of keeping their manmade rituals but keeping their hearts far from God. Don't get me wrong, neither Jesus nor Paul is unconcerned about our conduct, but they're deeply concerned about our knowing that physical, material, & edible things, in themselves, cannot sanctify or de-sanctify us. If you think your abstinence from something or your discipline regarding something else makes you better than others before God, you don't understand the gospel of God's grace. We aren't to prioritize things that aren't in the Bible because God's given us everything we need for life & godliness in His Word. It's God's grace & mercy that makes us right with Him. When a person is **pure** in heart & mind, his perspectives on **all things are pure**, & that inner purity produces outer purity. Legalism presumes a person can make himself acceptable to God by keeping certain ceremonies & traditions & by avoiding things considered evil. The idea that by doing or not doing certain things

a person is able, by his own power & merit, to please & reconcile himself to God has always been the basic heresy of false religion. Jesus clearly taught external things, such as eating certain foods, couldn't defile. What defiles is the sin that comes from the heart. Cults today may not be into Jewish dietary laws, but invariably, they're into legalism. They teach you can commend yourself to God by doing things & they'll tell you what they are. But they don't deal with the sinfulness of the human heart. Jesus rebuked the legalistic Pharisees saying, **you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy & lawlessness** (Mt 23:28). God's grace is opposed to legalism because His grace is free, undeserved favor. Here's a few definitions of grace: BB Warfield said, *Grace is free sovereign favor to the ill-deserving*. John Stott put it this way: *Grace is love that cares & stoops & rescues*. & Jerry Bridges says it's *God reaching downward to people who are in rebellion against Him*.⁸ As Titus 2:11-14 shows us, God's grace results in true holiness both inwardly & outwardly. **2:11-14**

What do you do with rebellious & divisive people who won't listen to God's truth & want to lead you down endless arguments about the Law or their own weird views? **Titus 3:9-11**

Paul tells us that elders must refute false teachers' wrong words by teaching sound doctrine & exposing false doctrine. False teachers also have...

2. Wrong Motives On the surface, false teachers often seem like nice, moral people. But as Jesus pointed out, legalists look like beautiful, whitewashed tombs, but inside they're full of dead men's bones & uncleanness (Mt 23:27). Like a dishonest salesman, they're smooth-talkers but their motive is to deceive for their own advantage. These men were greedy & focused on their own personal gain (11). Crete was legendary for this. One ancient writer wrote:

*Money is so highly valued among them, that its possession is not only thought to be necessary, but highly creditable; & in fact greed & avarice are so native to the soil in Crete, that they are the only people in the world among whom no stigma attaches to any sort of gain whatever.*⁹

Cicero wrote, *Moral principles are so divergent that the Cretans consider highway robbery honorable.*¹⁰ These false teachers' actions are dishonest in the sense that their true motive is to

⁸ Quoted at www.christianity.com/theology/what-is-grace.html

⁹ Polybius, cited at www.preceptaustin.org

¹⁰ *De Republica*, 3.9.15

gain a profit rather than to speak the truth & serve others. Older translations speak of Paul's opponents seeking **filthy lucre** (KJV) & **base gain** (RSV). These expressions communicate the mercenary intent of those teaching things they shouldn't teach. What drives such men is the motive of personal gain. False teachers exploit their followers, milking them for money while they themselves live in luxury. The motives & objectives of false teachers are in contrast to those who're godly. Loving money shouldn't be found in elders (7) & those are the very things false teachers cherish. It's a mark of false teachers to love money. False teachers are known by their wrong words, wrong motives, & by their ...

3. Wrong Actions Only God can evaluate a person's heart, but by the way they live, unbelievers usually betray their unbelief. By their words, they profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him. People who trust in their own works tend to have an air of superiority about them, believing, like the ancient Greek Gnostics, that they're *in the know* about religious matters & live on a level above other people. They not only **profess to know God** but to know Him better than others. The truth is, they don't know Him at all. **By their deeds, they deny Him**, & because of their unbelief (16), He denies them (Mt 10:33). They hold **to a form of godliness** but **have denied its power** (2 Tim 3:5). That's what Jesus taught when He said of false teachers, **You will know them by their fruits** (Mt 7:16). Though God doesn't accept or reject us on the basis of our works, He is concerned about our actions. This is made clear here. After condemning his opponents' wrong words & motives, Paul now warns us by identifying their wrong actions. Their lives don't match with their words. Paul says, they're **detestable, disobedient, & worthless** for doing anything good. Their deeds deny their knowledge of God. Disobedience & disbelief go together as does saving faith & good deeds. We aren't saved by our good works but God does save us for good works (Eph 2:8-10). As John makes clear, the true test of genuine faith is our behavior. **By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' & does not keep His commandments, is a liar, & the truth is not in him** (1 Jn 2:3-4). Paul quotes the Cretan poet, Epimenides, a highly respected intellectual of the 6th century BC who was

considered to be one of the 7 great wise men of Greece. He was called a *prophet* by Aristotle & Cicero. **12-13a**

By calling him a **prophet**, Paul doesn't mean he was a prophet of God. He's saying that someone they recognized as their own prophet condemned them. The quote involves the famous liars paradox, that if all Cretans are liars & a Cretan tells you that, then he was lying, so he must have been speaking the truth. Paul's simply making the point that Cretans are generally **liars, evil beasts, & lazy gluttons**, as their own prophet confirmed (12). The idea behind **evil beasts** is that of behaving like a wild animal, living solely on the level of appetites & passions. Such people are malicious & savage. The meaning of **lazy gluttons** is self-evident. Cretans hated to work but loved to eat. They were self-indulgent, greedy, lustful, & overfed. So Paul's telling Titus to warn the Cretan believers about their cultural inclination toward these sins, which marked the false teachers, so they wouldn't blindly fall into the same sins. Crete in that day is similar to America in our day in that you can't trust anything you read, hear, or see. Liars & spin-doctors are all around us. So why should anybody believe the Christian preachers? Why should anyone believe the gospel in Crete or in our world today? There's one irrefutable argument: If the gospel actually transforms people's lives, if **liars, evil beasts, & lazy gluttons** (12) became self-controlled, upright, holy, & disciplined people, then the credibility of the message is evident.¹¹ Paul writes, **reprove** these false teachers **severely**. Why? **So that they may be sound in the faith** (13). Titus was to try to correct their error & sinfulness so that **they may be sound in the faith**. As someone said, *the surgeon of the soul only cuts to achieve a cure*. Titus was to convince them of their errors. But he was to do so **severely**, which means sharply, as one cuts off something with a single blow of an ax. You don't correct error by hints or nice suggestions. **Being sound** means being spiritually healthy. It implies if you don't correct these spiritual errors, like a serious disease, they'll lead to spiritual death. **The faith** points to a well-defined, narrow body of truth. We can know when others or we are in it & we can know when others or we turn away from it. Those who are involved in empty talk, deception (10), selfish

¹¹ Robert J. Morgan, *Nelson's Annual Preacher's Sourcebook: 2004 Edition*, p 24

gain (11), & lies (12) should be rebuked, **so that they may be sound in the faith** (13). Elders are to guard against false teachers who are known by their wrong words, motives, & actions.

History tells us Christopher Columbus was stranded in Jamaica & needed supplies. He knew that a lunar eclipse was to occur the next day. He told the tribal chief something along these lines: *Unless you give me supplies, the God who protects me will punish you. The moon shall lose its light!* When the eclipse darkened the sky, Columbus got all the supplies he needed.¹²

It's said that in the early 1900's, an Englishman tried the same trick on a Sudanese chief. *If you do not follow my orders, he warned, vengeance will fall upon you & the moon will lose its light.* The chief is said to have replied, *If you're referring to the lunar eclipse, that doesn't happen until the day after tomorrow.*¹³

That African chief was protected from deception because he knew the truth. It's the job of elders to protect the flock from deception by teaching God's truth & by refuting the many false teachings that surround us continually. This morning, don't be one who professes to know God but then deny Him by your deeds (16). Instead, believe fully in Christ & His perfect life & death & resurrection on your behalf & confess truly that He is Lord. Rom 10:9-10 says if you do those things you can be saved from God's wrath by God's grace for God's glory. & when you're truly saved, you'll be changed, with a new heart, new desires, & a new nature that's increasingly made more like your wonderful & merciful Savior, Jesus Christ. PRAY

Even in the midst of the times we live in, we have much to be thankful for. I am thankful for each one of you. Your love, prayers, encouragement to me & your commitment to Christ & His church makes me grateful. As we celebrate Thanksgiving this week remember Who we are thankful to & give Him your praise & thanksgiving. May your week be one of blessing & thanksgiving.

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_1504_lunar_eclipse

¹³ Told by Glenn Durham, *Nice Preaching, Order in the Church!* www.scribd.com/document/168118415/2010-10-31