



## Sermon #3 - Titus

1.10-16

True or False?

We are in week 3 of Paul's letter to Titus. The only letter by the way that is written specifically to a church planter. Which makes this letter resonate with me. For those of you newer around Mercy church we are still pretty young, coming up on our third birthday this September. And what an exciting September it's gonna be.

Paul is writing this letter to Titus and is passing along the most important things a church plant needs to believe and to live out in order to establish a church family that will believe for the long haul. Not just believe, but in believing they will multiply their

influence across the known world as they take what they learn here in this letter and teach it to others. And so we are looking in here saying what do we need to grab hold of so that our faith is not just a burst of emotion or wave of excitement but instead it is a deep relationship with Jesus that lasts for the long haul. That's what we are seeing as we walk through the letter.

Titus planted this church in Crete. And we haven't talked about Crete yet but today it's gonna come up. Crete was one of the most immoral places in all of the ancient world. Like Las Vegas of the ancient Mediterranean. Except it was an island that was also known as a hub for piracy. So not even vegas, more like Tortuga. Imagine planting a church among the cast of the pirates of the caribbean...or you know, myrtle beach.

- Historians say the people there stayed drunk
- Lying was celebrated as an artform. In fact, in greek to lie was "to crete" <sup>12</sup>, That's not true, you are creting! Or something. In fact the historian Polybius said there was nowhere in the ancient world with more corrupt politics that tilted public policy towards those in power than in Crete.

See what makes this letter so relevant to you and I is Paul is teaching how to live out the christian faith in a difficult immoral place like Crete where Christianity is belittled and mocked and there are a ton of other worldviews. That's what Paul is writing to answer. How do you build your life on something that the majority

finds to be a silly myth? That's what he really focuses in on in what we are covering today.

Last week we talked about elders. Who serve as the leaders of the church. And primarily we talked about who they are. Out of 8 pages of my notes, 7 were devoted to their character. **Elders go first** in faithfulness. In the home and in leading God's people. And then we ended with their job is to teach what is right and refute what is wrong. That is where we finished in verse 9. And today we are going to see WHY that job is so incredibly important.

Because in the passage we are about to read Paul is going to say there are a lot of false teachings and false teachers out there. And in today's passage He's going to expose those false teachings. And that's going to be big because the dangerous thing about false teachings is you can become so convinced by them so subtly that when the truth is told to you it could seem absurd. For example: I hear a recording of some computer voice Tuesday saying the word "Yanny." And somebody asks me what I hear. So I say Yanny. And they say "Actually its saying Laurel." And I ask if they mean The word in english is Laurel because the audio sound you are hearing is of course Yanny. And they say no the word coming out of the speakers is Laurel. And my head explodes off my neck in rage because how could you possibly hear Laurel. And then overwhelming evidence is revealed to me that the original recording is actually Laurel and I'm forced to realize that my perception of reality is off. And its so bizzare I think I need a head

scan. \*If somebody listens to this sermon in 5 years it is going to make no sense

But today we are talking about false teaching and what I have to ask you to be open to is that there may be a false gospel you are living by and you don't even know it. But the great news is that unlike Yanny v Laurel you can hear the true gospel and today compare it to what you've been living by. That takes humility though so I'm asking all of us to be open to that today.

Today I'm going to walk through the passage to show you what he's saying, then lay how we spot false doctrine and what we do with it. And how we preserve true doctrine and what we do with it. let's get in...

[10] For there are many rebellious people, full of empty talk and deception, especially those from the circumcision party. [11] It is necessary to silence them; they are ruining entire households by teaching what they shouldn't in order to get money dishonestly.

There were people in their day and there are people in our day whose AIM is to take people away from the faith. That's their goal. Remember verse 9 was his charge to appoint elders who will remain faithful to the word. Why is that job important? Because these false teachers **AIM** to take people away from the faith.

They are rebellious which means they stir up dissention in the church. They readily reject church leadership and actively encourage others to resist church leadership as well. Instead of talking with their leaders they try to

gather people to their cause and while it's under the mask of "concern" its actually rebellion. They are full of empty talk & deception. That means they talk a good game. I've known these people. They talk a good game that can convince others but their lives aren't marked by genuine love of the Lord or commitment to him. Just empty talk. And then he calls out the circumcision party. Which is a very odd term because I know circumcision...and it is not a party. What's he talking about there?

He's talking about the jews that have come around the church in this time. They come from a background where there are A LOT of laws. And they are struggling through this idea of all you need is God's grace, and the only way you can get it is by faith: Grace alone through faith alone.

Some are teaching a gospel that says you need Jesus AND you need to be circumcised in order to be approved of by God. And Paul says they gotta be silenced! Which is strong...but look at what is at stake. They are pulling households away and are doing it for their own personal gain.

And in another spot Paul actually ups the language about these false teachers even more. People in their culture & in ours, in our city, maybe even here listening I don't know, that have been deceived by the demonic and are now led by evil spirits....And you are like WHOA man...that's a bit too far. Well we don't use that a lot so it might sound like I've jumped the shark but look at what Paul says in 1 Timothy 4...Timothy is the other young pastor Paul wrote to.

[1] Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, [2] through the hypocrisy of liars who consciences are seared. [3] They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods that God created to be received with gratitude by those who believe and know the truth.

See what happened in this situation he's coaching Timothy in is that some people were adding religious laws ON TO the Gospel. And that is always a false gospel. Listen right now: Jesus plus anything = false gospel. And that's what these jews were doing.

They were putting boundaries on something God had not put boundaries on. They were saying if you want to be acceptable to God you need Jesus but you also need to be pure in dietary laws. That's the same thing happening in Titus. They are preaching a Jesus plus circumcision gospel. It's a half-grace half-works gospel. And Paul calls a Jesus plus Anything gospel demonic. Sometimes we reserve that word for like a candle lit room with a wiji board and pentagrams everywhere. And Paul is saying no, the gospel is faith alone through grace alone and anything that adds to that is false teaching and the goal of false teaching is to take people away from Christ which is the goal of the enemy therefore false teaching is...demonic.

Now back over in Titus look at our next two verses... 12-13 he starts talking about the two ways this happens in crete.

[12] One of their very own prophets said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.”

Paul says ...YEP [13] This testimony is true. For this reason, rebuke them sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith.”<sup>1</sup> Tell us how you really feel Paul. What’s he doing? He’s quoting a Cretan philosopher from a couple hundred years earlier named Epiminedes. And he’s saying I’m not saying this about them, they say this about themselves. your guy is saying it. But he aint wrong.” They were proud of their reputation. Like What happens in Crete Stays in Crete.

Now as a Christian you are called to be distinct from the culture. And you see the moral debauchery of crete and there is a tendency to think ‘as long as I’m not like them.’...BUT the question is... how do you separate yourself? Going to church doesn’t separate you. A lot of people thing I’ll go to church and that will make me different. No Paul is saying Sound doctrine separates you. If you are IN the church but under false teaching, that’s just as bad. That’s really what he’s after in verse 14.

[14] and may not pay attention to Jewish myths and the commands of people who reject the truth.

The danger isn’t just that Cretans are partiers...its that there are people IN THE CHURCH who are peddling an

half-grace half-works gospel. And THAT is MORE dangerous than some permanent spring breakers. In fact let me say right here: false doctrine in the church is just as bad for you as any sin outside of the church. In fact, because its cloaked in religion its actually worse.

Let me ask you a question: why does Paul need to say this? Again we all THINK we would never believe false doctrine. Sounds so ominous. False Doctrine sounds Like the lame bad guy. So let’s ask the question about this half-grace half-works gospel...

Why do people eat this up? Ya’ll as long as there has been church people have eaten up this false gospel. It is FAR and away the most deceitful one. Why? **The one simple answer is: Pride.**

**We love the idea that we can do something to EARN some of God’s grace.** If we follow the rules and do the right thing we can play a role, have some sway, in where we stand with God.

So follow this thought pattern I’m about to show you. Paul is warning big time against it here and listen this same thing happens in many many people today.

We get the idea that we are good and wickedness is over there somewhere. And the laws create a fence that

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<sup>1</sup> Chester, Tim. Titus For You: For reading, for feeding, for leading (God’s Word For You) (Kindle Locations 575-578). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

keeps the wickedness out. And if I will do good things and stay on this side of the fence God will love me. But a fence isn't built just to keep things out, it's build to keep things in too.

I have a friend named Andrew Hopper.<sup>2</sup> He used to breed pitbulls. And one time I took my kids up to his house and we go out back and he's got two BIG OLD 100lb pit bulls. Each were fenced in their own kennel. And my boys walk up to the fence and Andrew says "Don't put your hands on the fence!"

Now why did Andrew put that fence up? Was he afraid of my 4yr old and 3yr old climbing in there and hurting this dog? NO. In fact he aint worried about anyone messing with that dog. That dog is gonna be ok. Fences aren't just designed to keep things out, they are designed to keep things in too.

We have a fundamental misconception of the law when we think it is to keep bad wickedness from climbing over the fence and attacking me who is good. No, the laws of God are there to restrain what is already wicked within us from getting out into the world. The only way we get to "god has done some things for me and I have done some things for me" is to have the misconception that I'm not completely stained by sin. That if I stay on my side of the fence I'm ok.

But Romans 5-6 says we are already sinners. All of us have this rebellion against God, this evil that wants to come out. If you want proof go serve in our 2 year old

room. 2 year olds have JUST enough mobility to express their rebellion against authority, but not enough awareness on how to be sneaky with it. And we act on that sinful desire in us and that sin stains us making us defiled in God's eyes.

[15] To the pure, everything is pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; in fact, both their mind and conscience are defiled. [16] They claim to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work.

How do we become pure? You can't become pure by staying on your side of the fence. You are already defiled. So how do you become pure? That's where the gospel answers us.

Jesus, who was the only one who was ever actually pure in himself...he became defiled so that we sinners might become pure.

Jesus was pure and holy and he came to take our place so that we might become holy and pure. That's why 1 John 1.9-10 says

[9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. 1 John 1:9-10

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew used a pitbull illustration in teaching this passage on Titus. While this DID happen, I gotta give the credit to Andrew for applying it so thoughtfully to how we view our sin & God's grace. In fact, I owe a great deal of the influence of how this sermon is shaped to Andrew's work in this passage.

Listen the way God cleanses you from your sin...which is the core hope of the gospel message...is that you admit you are a sinner and that you deserve death...and then you accept as true that Jesus was on the cross in your place. When you believe that the ONLY way you can be accepted by God is because Jesus died in your place. So he gets your sinfulness and you get his righteousness... when you believe that, God wipes your sin record from you. He cleans you.

And that's where some of you are. You believe this and you are growing in this. And you need to CELEBRATE IT! If the son has set you free then you are free indeed! In fact man we who believe this need to set a tone on Sundays that this is a celebration. Hallelujah and hands up and thank you Jesus and Amen because we were dead in our sin and God made us ALIVE!

But that's not where all of you are. Some of you still think you are good. You've had decades of Disney telling you to follow your heart. And while Disney makes killer movies & music, it's got terrible theology. Your heart is twisted and selfish and will deceive you. If you think you are good on your own, You are still believing a half-gospel half-grace and that is false teaching. You are not good on your own.

And that might be a bummer at first but I actually think it is freeing to you. Because it means YOU DON'T HAVE TO CLEAN YOURSELF UP TO BE ACCEPTED BY GOD!! I watch Christians struggle with this. They drift into sin and they drift away from church. Because down in their heart they either think their sin is no big deal which is a

false belief, or they feel guilty and once they clean themselves up then they'll come to church again. THAT'S NOT GRACE ALONE THROUGH FAITH ALONE. THAT'S FAITH PLUS WORKS which is a false doctrine!

We have this song we sing around here, it's an old hymn that says "what can wash away my sin? NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD OF JESUS" "What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. OH PRECIOUS IS THE FLOW...The flow of his blood...that makes me white as snow...because it cleanses me...NO OTHER FOUNT I KNOW (NOT THE FOUNT OF HALF-WORKS HALF-JESUS, NOT THE FOUNT OF SELF-HELP, Not the fount of follow your heart)...nothing but the blood of Jesus."

That is the gospel. And some of you need to believe it finally today. Don't clean yourself up. Come to Jesus and he will clean you up. He will make you a new creation!

OK...That's the passage. Now let me show you how this plays out. The elders are charged with refuting false doctrine so lets talk about how you spot false doctrine. Two hallmarks of false doctrine:

1. False Doctrine adds to the gospel - Listen guys Jesus plus anything is a false gospel. We do that a lot in the bible belt. We add to the gospel. Gotta look right, act right, dress right. If you will clean yourself up then God will clean you up. And That is a false gospel. Listen that is what Mormons and Jehovah's witnesses believe. They've got laws that build a fence to keep the wickedness out. Obey the laws, you'll be good. That's

false gospel. Christianity is Grace Alone through Faith Alone. So if you want to add to it, you might as well go find another religion. Scientology, Mormonism, Islam, all of these will say faith PLUS works. Not Christianity though.

Now I know the danger is to think we are peddling cheap grace. Like you can believe without changing. That's NOT at all what I'm saying. When you believe the gospel, everything will change. But it won't be because you are cleaning yourself up. It will be because God is cleaning you up. His spirit will be in you, convicting you of sin and shaping you more into the person God created you to be.

## 2. False Teaching compromises with culture

Listen this takes all kinds of forms and you have to KNOW the gospel in order to spot where teaching is compromising with culture. Let me give you some examples of false teaching that compromises with culture

- The Prosperity Gospel - This message compromises with a culture that desires and celebrates personal wealth. So it says if you will sew a little seed of faith by sending \$20 to this ministry, then God will multiply that wealth back to you 10 times over. That's the culture pushing into the church. That's false teaching.
- The Non-Suffering Gospel - There is a desire we have in culture to avoid suffering. We want an easy good life. And there is a brand of Christianity out there that says any suffering you experience has something to do with a lack of

faith on your part. That's the culture, that's sin, pushing into the church. The gospel is grace ALONE through faith alone. God doesn't say you won't suffer. He says the gospel guarantees he will be with you in the middle of it and give you the strength to endure it in a way that brings him glory even if that ends in death.

- The No-Hell Gospel - Hey God is love right? Why would there be a hell if God is love? Yet we know the absence of hell means sin doesn't matter and that must mean all people go to heaven no matter what which means God accepts all evil. That's the culture of relative truth pushing into the church
- This one might be a little painful. 50 years ago White Evangelicals by and large sat out of the civil rights movement. Why? I don't mean to oversimplify it, but many sat out Because it would have cost them a great deal of political power to stand with their black brothers and sisters. What happened? Culture...a desire for power...pushed into the church. And we are STILL experiencing the effects of it.

How do we handle false teaching?

Paul gives some pretty sharp language to what the elders are supposed to do when false teaching arises. It says in verses 11 & 13

1. Rebuke false teaching - That means we are to give a sharp critique to reveal what is false and point to what is true. Which means our elders really have to know their stuff. This is why all of our elders are assessed in

their theology and knowledge of scripture. It's why elders are not new Christians but instead Christians who have walked with Christ for some time. Because the church must be protected against false teaching

- Here's how this works. If the elders are approached about someone teaching false doctrine or trying to stir up disunity by contradicting the elders teaching we are going to sit down with them and work it out.

The other way we handle false teaching is

2. Promote sound teaching - Sound teaching is just biblical truth rightly interpreted. So here's the secret sauce to how we teach the bible. In our sermons: We preach through the bible and as we do so we take you to the cross & empty tomb. Because every passage of scripture either points to or reflects on the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And as a church we are going to be uncompromising on the essential doctrines of the faith

- God Created the world, man sinned and separated himself from God, Jesus is fully God and fully man who was born of a virgin lived a sinless life and died on the cross for our sins. 3 days later he rose from the grave. His death and resurrection is by God's grace alone and we are saved from our sins by faith in that message alone. Nothing else. He ascended to the right hand of the father and one day he's coming back. Those are close handed and we believe

And listen we teach that stuff every week. We put it in our community group discussions every week. Here's

why: The best way to spot a counterfeit is to become intimately familiar with the real thing. That's how federal agents are trained to spot counterfeit money. By studying and knowing the real thing. Consistent exposure to SOUND teaching makes false teaching easy to spot.

And let me say this is one reason why we as your elders LOVE preaching the gospel to you. We know preaching drives the church and so whenever someone stands up here you can be sure they've spent 20 hours or more preparing a sermon. We are pretty intense on that because we know sound doctrine is so important. And we love you and love leading you into it.

Lastly here's a question for the car ride home How committed am I to sitting under sound teaching? Let me talk to the Christian first and then to you who are not Christians yet. Christian, if sound teaching is this important I'm not trying to shame you here. But I'm asking: how important is sitting under the teaching of your pastors? Let me ask it this way: Do you build church around the rest of your schedule or the rest of your schedule around church?

Again that isn't meant to condemn you. It's meant to help you look at what is going on in your heart. I've often found those who aren't sitting under sound teaching are also not sitting under the bible in their own personal lives as well. Incredible promises and truth are there for you.

Ok if you are not a Christian let me ask you to think through this question. It's going to sound a little deep but I want you to think about it on the ride home. Did God create me or did I create him? I say it that way because I often hear people say "my God would never say that, or my God would never ask me to do that." And my challenge to you is that if God never asks you to do anything you wouldn't do anyway... he didn't create you, you created him. So IF you believe God created you, the next step is what does he say about your life?

And this is where Christianity, I believe, has the best answer....GOSPEL. God Loves You, God Wants You.