

DEALING WITH FALSE TEACHERS
TITUS 1:10-16

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

James Pike (PROJECTOR ON--- JAMES PIKE) was raised as a Catholic. He was born in 1913 in Oklahoma City. His father died when he was just two years old. His mother remarried, and the family moved to California. James became disillusioned with his Catholic upbringing and came to describe himself as an agnostic.

He was a bright kid. He went to college at USC and then went to Yale Law School. He was on the fast track to success. He taught at law school, and he established his own law firm. When WW II broke out, James gave much of that career up to serve his country. He was commissioned as a lieutenant, and he was assigned to the Office of Naval Intelligence.

In the midst of his experiences in the war he rethought his core beliefs and professed to be a Christian. He was so serious that he was ordained in the Episcopal Church. He was assigned to serve in a church in Washington, DC, and he became a chaplain at George Washington University. James seemed to be following a good spiritual path. Yet at the end of his life there were four efforts made by his own denomination to try him as a heretic. How did that happen?

The danger presented to churches by bad doctrines and false teachers is as old as the Christian church itself. The passage before us today addresses that danger and provides us with instruction about how to deal with it.

We are three weeks in to the study of the brief New Testament book of Titus. We have seen that the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to his coworker Titus. It seems that the Apostle Paul was released from his first imprisonment in Rome and took with him Titus on another missionary trip. One of their first stops was the island of Crete. (CRETE) There was some Christian activity on this island, which went back to the time of Pentecost when Jewish Christians returned to the island with a faith in Jesus. But the churches were not well organized. So after a brief visit Paul left Titus on the island to strengthen the churches and to appoint elders. Last week we looked at the qualifications which Paul laid down for choosing elders in the local church.

One of the chief challenges which these new elders will face is establishing and promoting core Christian beliefs. It was especially challenging in that the New Testament was not yet put together. So there was little reference material available to point new Christians to which they could study. Thus it was that there was a problem with inadequate teaching and false teaching. But even today some two thousand years later with the New Testament readily available along with lots of good written and spoken material, the church of Christ is faced with threats of false teachers from within

and without. How are we to deal with them? Such is the focus of the passage before us this morning.

I.

Let's consider then THE PROBLEM OF FALSE TEACHERS (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE PROBLEM OF FALSE TEACHERS), as it is presented to us in vv. 10 & 11. We saw last week that elders are charged by the Apostle Paul with the basic responsibility of pastoring the flock. The job of shepherding sheep involves two basic things: providing food for the sheep and protecting the sheep from enemies. It is the latter problem which is in focus here.

We read in v. 10: **“For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.”** Paul is talking about false teachers. It is fascinating to see how he describes them. He says that they are insubordinate. That is not how they usually come across. They come across as smooth and friendly and welcoming. They express spiritual concern.

In 1955 James Pike started a religious TV show. It became the most popular religious program on TV. He and his wife addressed topics of the day. At the end of each program he would conclude with what he called “a five minute commercial for God.” What could be wrong with that? Well, what he had to say about the Bible and Christian doctrine was beginning to stray from orthodoxy, from what was right and true. When people don't believe the Bible any more, the problem is insubordination. We are not listening to our commanding officer.

Paul says that we are dealing with empty talkers. They may be smooth. They may sound good. They may use religious words, but the meaning behind them has changed. In about 1960 some teens from a church here in Boulder City went to a youth conference. There they heard a speaker warn about teachers and pastors who use religious and Biblical words but who do not believe the Bible. He told the young people to ask their teachers and pastors if they believe that Abraham really existed and if there was a real universal flood in the time of Noah and if Jesus was really born of a virgin and other similar questions.

These young people came back to Boulder City and asked their pastor these questions. They discovered that the pastor did not believe the Bible on these issues. The teens told their parents. They tuned in to the problem and discovered what the pastor really believed. A number of them left the church. They started their own Bible study and worship group. Out of that group came our church.

Paul in v 10 speaks of “those of the circumcision party.” At least some, perhaps many, of the false teachers are Jewish. We have been reminded previously that at Pentecost described in Acts #2 when the Holy Spirit came upon the first Christians, there were Jews in Jerusalem from all over the Roman Empire who came to observe this religious feast. We are specifically told that there were Jews from Crete there. Some of them responded to the gospel and returned to their home island. So these first Christians

were Jewish. But as happened in other parts of the Roman Empire the gospel also spread to Gentiles.

In our recent study of Galatians we saw that a key issue in the early church was this: Do Gentiles have to become Jews in order to be right with God? That was what all of the apostles of Jesus had grown up to believe. But in Acts #10 Peter showed up at a Roman centurion's house and told the gathered Gentiles about Jesus. He saw these people believe and start speaking in tongues as had the believing Jews at Pentecost.

It was difficult for these early Christians who were Jewish to accept this. Some of them kept telling Gentile Christians as well as Jewish Christians that they still had to follow the law of Moses in terms of eating only certain foods and being circumcised and observing Jewish feasts. Apparently some version of this teaching was being presented to the Christians on Crete.

Throughout Christian history teachers have come along and tried to convince Christians to add things to the pure gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. It is good that you believe in Jesus, but you also need to follow the *Book of Mormon*. It is good that you believe in Jesus, but you also need to follow Mary Baker Eddy and her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. It is good that you believe in Jesus, but you also need to follow the teachings of Ellen White. It is good that you believe in Jesus, but you must also follow the teachings of Charles Taze Russell and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Even within evangelical Christianity we have this temptation to add rules to the gospel. To be fully accepted by God you must belong to our church or never touch another drop of alcohol or stop going to movies or tithe or stop sinning. But all of this is really false teaching.

Paul continues in v. 11: **"They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach."** False teachers are to be silenced. How do you do that? There are a couple of basic things which need to be done. First there is the positive thing. Back in v. 9 Paul told Titus that elders need to teach sound doctrine. You promote what is right and true and base it on the teaching of the apostles.

Then there is the negative thing. You tell false teachers to stop teaching what is false. Down in v. 13 Paul says that church leaders are to rebuke them sharply. You tell them to cut it out. Church leaders have some control over false teachers within the church. You don't let them have teaching positions in the church. If they continue to cause a problem, you cut them off from church membership. Church leaders obviously have less control over false teachers outside of the church.

In v. 11 Paul says that these false teachers are "upsetting whole families." Churches did not yet have their own buildings. They met in homes. The first churches probably

involved extended families. So the first level of negative effect of false teaching would be the household. There was division caused by the false teachers..

False teachers were teaching what they should not teach. We don't know exactly what that false teaching was. Probably some of it involved the efforts of Jewish Christians to get Gentiles to follow the Old Testament law.

Some of the motivation for the teaching was selfish gain. We know in the first century that speakers traveled around the empire looking for opportunities to speak before various groups for a price. Typically tradesmen like pottery makers and leather workers and stonemasons would have their own guilds and would worship gods associated with their trade. On various holidays they would hire these speakers to come in and give a good talk. Apparently there were Christian teachers who were following this model. Paul thought that it was inappropriate.

Certainly we see a similar thing on TV today with prosperity preachers who promise that if you send them a generous donation, God will see it and you will be blessed. The motivation of teaching for shameful gain is also an issue in some of the cults. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was fined \$5 million in February by the Securities and Exchange Commission because it was hiding its investment holdings. The SEC said that between 1997 and 2019 the church formed multiple shell companies to hide its holdings from the public--- and from its own church members. A whistleblower filed a complaint with the IRS in 2019 saying that the church was breaking federal laws by hiding its investment funds. According to the *Wall Street Journal* the church's holdings had grown to \$100 billion. (NBC online, 6/17/2024)

James Pike appeared to start out his ministry career on a good spiritual path. As a chaplain at Vassar College he criticized the faculty for being Unitarian in its religious beliefs, and for promoting humanism and Marxism. It was then that he went off to seminary. The seminary which pastor-types choose to attend has a big effect on their belief system. James Pike went to Union Seminary in New York. It is known as a very liberal institution which has a low view of the authority of the Bible. James Pike's views began to change. He took a lead in promoting the ordination of women in the Episcopal Church. He became a supporter of Planned Parenthood. He began to question central tenets of the Christian faith. He created a stir among Episcopalians.

II.

We come then to THE PROBLEM OF SIN IN CULTURE, which is described in vv. 12-14. (II. THE PROBLEM OF SIN IN CULTURE) According to v. 12 Paul says, **“One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’”** Cretans, other than Jews, worshipped the Greek gods. One of them was regarded as a prophet. The saying about the low morality of the Cretans is generally attributed to a guy named Epimenides, who lived in the sixth and fifth centuries BC. He was honored by many fellow Cretans by being proclaimed after his death to be a god.

Such was the cultural challenge in Crete. The people had a reputation for lying, being evil beasts and lazy gluttons. A couple of weeks ago I mentioned that there is a Greek word *kretizo*, derived from the name of Crete, which means “to play the liar.”

Crete was not known for having a lot of wild beasts in the first century. But the people had a reputation for barbarism in that they exhibited very cruel behavior in conflicts between various Cretan cities. There were also pirates based on Crete who were known for their barbarism. And apparently they had a reputation for being lazy gluttons.

Verse 13: **“This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith...”** Paul agreed with this cultural evaluation. A Greek historian by the name of Polybius lived in the second century BC. He wrote, **“So much in fact do sordid love for gain and lust for wealth prevail among them that the Cretans are the only people in the world in whose eyes no gain is disgraceful.”** (Polybius 6.46.3)

The Roman writer Cicero lived even closer to our time period. He was around in the first century BC. He wrote, **“Moral principles are so divergent that the Cretans... consider highway robbery honorable.”** (*De Republica* 3.9.15) Such were the negative moral influences which the Cretan Christians had to confront and overcome.

Paul in v. 13 says that the appropriate response is to “rebuke them sharply.” The question is who the “them” are. Is it the false teachers who need to be rebuked or the Christians listening to them? Probably it is the Christians being exposed to this teaching. For Paul says that they are in the faith. They just need to become sound in the faith.

Notice that this is the foundational test of Christianity for the apostle. It is not emotional displays. It is not intellectual knowledge. It is right basic beliefs. The problem at Crete is that there were false teachers who were reflecting the sinfulness of their culture.

Verse 14 gives us some idea of the nature of the false teaching: **“...not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.”** It is not obvious what Paul means by Jewish myths. But there seems to have been a similar problem at Ephesus. In Paul’s letter to Timothy in Ephesus, written close to the time when Titus was written (1 TIMOTHY 1:4), the author said, speaking of people who teach strange doctrines, **“... nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.”**

In Jewish writings outside of the Bible there were various stories made up about people in the Old Testament genealogies which were used to support unbiblical practices. Perhaps Paul was addressing these stories. (PROJECTOR OFF) The commands of men in v. 14 in our passage refers to rules addressed in the next section.

In our own culture there are certainly problems with sin. We Christians recognize that there has been a significant decline in sexual standards in the last few decades. This was an issue for James Pike. He was married in 1938. Then he divorced his wife in 1941. He proceeded to have four children by his second wife. But he developed a reputation for being a womanizer. Some of this was known by some fellow Episcopalians. But because of the popularity he enjoyed with his TV show, he was elected to be bishop of California. In his position there he had a telephone installed in his office which he used only for keeping in contact with whichever woman he was having an affair.

There is an issue involved here which is called by psychologists cognitive dissonance. The idea is that people have an internal problem when their behavior does not match up with their standards. Something has to give. Either one's behavior needs to change, or one's standards have to change. As is too often the case, James Pike changed his moral standards. He began to criticize traditional Christian standards. Soon he was disputing Biblical doctrines like the Trinity, the virgin birth of Christ, and salvation by grace through faith. Later James Pike's oldest son committed suicide. A year later his secretary who was also his mistress committed suicide.

Many of the cults have this component within them of lowered sexual standards. The Mormons originally promoted polygamy. Joseph Smith and then Brigham Young had multiple wives. David Koresh in Waco, Texas, had twenty female partners. When I was a teenager the Children of God cult had some popularity. Its leader, David Berg, had multiple wives. Such is the character of sin in culture.

III.

We come then in vv. 15 & 16 to THE PROBLEM OF LEGALISM. (III. THE PROBLEM OF LEGALISM) The problem is introduced in v. 14 with the reference to "the commands of people." Verse 15 says, **"To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled."**

The religious issue is how does one become pure, clean before God. Verse 14 makes reference to the commands of people. This is the common teaching of religion. You have to follow rules in order to be right with God. Last week 1.8 million Muslims converged on Mecca in Saudi Arabia to fulfill one of the five pillars of Islam, which requires that every good Muslim once in his or her lifetime should make a visit to the Kaaba in Mecca, the home of Mohammed.

The letters to Timothy in Ephesus, written about the same time as Titus, appear to have addressed the same issue of legalism. There Paul writes (1 TIMOTHY 4:3) in #4 v. 3 about false teachers, **"who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth."**

I am not sure where the forbidding marriage thing came from. But we know that Jews had strict dietary laws. Some foods according to Old Testament law were clean, and some were unclean. There is evidence in Galatians and the Book of Acts that Jewish Christians tried to impose these rules on Gentile Christians. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The foundational issue is how do we get right with God. Man-made religion always has rules. In Islam it is the five pillars. In the cults there are always various requirements. True Christianity is different. If we skip ahead to # 3 in Titus in vv. 5-7 we read, “... **he [God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**”

If salvation is the result of grace, then it cannot be earned. In Ephesians #2 vv. 8-9 (PROJECTOR ON--- EPHESIANS 2:8-9) the Bible says, “**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**” Salvation is not the result of works. It does not come from following rules. It is not the result of any merit on our part. Our only responsibility is to believe. The price has been paid by Jesus in His death on the cross.

For us who have been purified by belief in Jesus, diet no longer matters. Paul says in 1 Timothy #4 v. 4 (1 TIMOTHY 4:4), “**For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving...**” These dietary rules no longer matter.

But to the impure, to false teachers everything is defiled. The first century BC Roman poet Horace wrote, “**Unless the vessel is pure, everything you pour into it grows bitter.**” It is belief in Jesus which makes us holy. An unholy man away from God makes everything unclean. His mind and conscience are both screwed up. Unbelief is the real problem. (PROJECTOR OFF) Unbelief confuses our rational perception and judgment which produces a pattern of behavior and thought which reinforces unbelief.

Verse 16: “**They [the false teachers] profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.**” The apostle has a pretty negative view of these false teachers. He regards them not just as unbelievers, but as heretics who claim to know God but actually seek to lead Christians astray. These characters promote a rule-based religion.

This legalism often is a problem within the true church. We have this tendency to add rules to what is necessary to be right with God. Now the Bible clearly identifies behaviors which are wrong and violate God’s standards. But how do we become right with God? Churches down through the centuries have complicated things. You have to believe in Jesus but you also have to do x, y, and z. You have to stop drinking alcohol or stop smoking or stop going to movies or give a tithe of you income to the church or

dress in a certain manner. Only then can you be accepted by God. The real gospel is: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.

James Pike came to deny many of the basics of the Christian faith. But he had a kind of legalism of his own. One of his most famous statements is this: **“Remember that life is not measured in hours but in accomplishments.”** That sounds to me like legalism. The story of life is what we have accomplished. That is what counts in life. The Bible says that we humans are all sinners headed for hell. What counts for eternity is what Jesus did in dying on the cross. What decides our destiny is not what we have accomplished but rather whether or not we have believed in Jesus.

James Pike continued to stray further and further from true Biblical doctrine. When his oldest son died, he sought out mediums to try to make contact with the dead. He became involved in spiritualism and the occult. He wrote a book entitled *The Other Side*, in which he described his paranormal experiences. One of them involved a televised seance through the involvement of a famous medium. All of this, of course, is in violation of clear statements of the Bible which forbid such activity.

James Pike and his behavior became something of an embarrassment to the Episcopal Church. Four separate attempts were made to charge Bishop Pike with heresy. Each of the efforts fell apart. In the end the Episcopal Church decided that there is no such thing as heresy. Episcopal leaders could only be censured for “acts” and not for opinions and teachings. Thus we see the demise of the Episcopal Church in America. Many Episcopal leaders were relieved when James Pike finally resigned as bishop of California.

In August of 1969 James Pike and his third wife decided to do research on another book on the historical Jesus. They decided to retrace the steps of Jesus in his experience of fasting in the wilderness. So they rented a car and set out for the desert without help of a guide and with little practical preparation. They ended up getting lost in the desert. Their car got stuck, and they were stranded. The much younger wife set out to get help. She eventually managed to get out of the desert and find help. But it took five days to find Bishop Pike. They found him dead in the wilderness, having apparently tried to climb a steep canyon wall and falling sixty feet to his death.

Jesus warned His followers that there would be false prophets and false teachers and people claiming to be Him right up to the time of His return. The best way to avoid being taken in by them is to study the Bible, to make sure that we understand the basics of the faith. We who are elders have a special responsibility to protect people in our congregation from false teaching. We appreciate your prayers to help us be on guard against such false teaching.