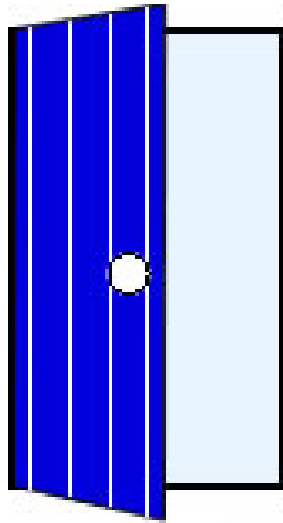


BIBLE STUDIES



Mill Lane Chapel

Titus

4) “Unruly and vain talkers”

Read Chapter 1: 10-16

As we have seen, Titus Chapter 1 can be divided in the following way: **(1)** the commission of Paul (vv1-4); **(2)** the charge to Titus (vv5-9); **(3)** the circumstances in Crete (vv10-16)

1) THE COMMISSION OF PAUL, vv1-4

In introducing the letter, Paul's refers to his calling as “a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ”, and to his specific ministry: “according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness” (v1). The connection between faith and godliness is vitally important, for “faith without works is dead” (James 2: 20). While Paul certainly had a unique place in the eternal purpose of God - “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; but hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed **unto me** according to the commandment of God our Saviour” (vv2-3) - we should never lose the sense of wonder at **our** part in God's purposes.

2) THE CHARGE TO TITUS, vv5-9

“For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee” (v5). The charge to Titus was both general (“set in order the things that are wanting”) and specific (“ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee”). Quite clearly, the elders had a key role in dealing with the problems in Crete. Amongst other important things, an elder “must hold fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound (‘healthful’) doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers” or, “that he may be able both to encourage with sound teaching and refute gainsayers” (v9, JND). His teaching has a ‘double-edge’: it encourages the Lord's people, and it refutes false teaching. The word “convince” means more than reprove; ‘it signifies a presentation of evidence so that the arguments of the opponents are beaten down and proved to be baseless’ (D.E.Hiebert). His work relates both to the members of the flock, and to the enemies of the flock. It has been said that ‘the shepherd must be able to tend the sheep, and drive away wolves’. This brings us to:

3) THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN CRETE, vv10-16

As we have already noted, these can be summed up in the words of Epimenides: “the Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies” or ‘always liars, evil wild beasts, lazy gluttons (v12, JND). They were ‘allergic to work’ (J.Waldron). The

word “slow” (*argos*, literally ‘against work’) means ‘inactive, idle, unfruitful, barren’ (W.E.Vine). Now read 2: 11-14. What a contrast! Believers are to “live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world”, remembering that “our Saviour Jesus Christ...gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works”. Notice that Paul confirms the observations of Epimenides. “This witness,” he says, “is true”. After all, since he was “one of themselves, even a prophet of their own”, Paul was able to quote him without causing offence. Paul’s diplomacy in this way should be noted!

Titus had, therefore, to contend with the natural characteristics of the Cretans. But that was not all. He also had to contend with false teachers (evidently Jews who were intent on imposing Jewish ordinances on Gentile believers, see vv10, 14), and it is striking that they exhibited the character of the Cretans. If the Cretans were “always liars” then the false teachers were “unruly and vain talkers” (1: 10). If the Cretans were “evil beasts”, then the false teachers were defiled in mind and conscience (1: 15). If the Cretans were ‘lazy gluttons’ then the false teachers were “unto every good work reprobate” (1: 16). The ‘religion’ of the false teachers was well-adapted to the islanders. It should be pointed out that their profession of faith (v16) made them particularly dangerous, and that the danger was heightened by their Jewish background.

In summary, they were unsound in three ways. They were (a) unsound in speech (vv10-14); **(b)** unsound in thought (v15); **(c)** unsound in deeds (v16).

a) Unsound in speech, vv10-14

As we have noticed, since the Cretans were “always liars” (v12), then the false teachers were “unruly and vain **talkers** and deceivers”. We must notice:

i) The identity of the teachers, v10. Particular reference is made in this connection to “they of the circumcision”. This refers to the Judaisers. Men who ‘professed to have been converted to Christianity, but being of the circumcision and having a knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures, their teaching stemmed largely from Judaism’ (D.E.West).

While Paul makes no direct reference here to the misuse of the law in connection with salvation, we must not forget that this was a serious danger to Gentile believers. See, for example, Acts 15: 1: “And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren (at Antioch), and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved”. The gross error of this suggestion can be gauged from Paul’s observation: “if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2: 21).

The believers in Crete were evidently in danger of being diverted from “sound doctrine” to “Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth”

(v14). Compare 1 Tim. 1: 3-4, “As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith; so do”.

ii) The characteristics of the teachers, v10-11. They are described as “unruly and vain talkers and deceivers”, and there were many of them. Believers are to “speak every man truth with his neighbour” (Eph. 4: 25)

- **“Unruly”** (*anupotaktos*) means ‘not in subjection’ (compare v6). They did not submit to “sound doctrine”. They are quite unlike the Psalmist who exclaimed, “Thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counsellors” (Psalm 119: 24). There is nothing “unruly” about a “word fitly spoken”: it is likened to “apples of gold in pictures of silver” (Prov. 25: 11). See also Prov. 15: 23, “a word spoken in due season, how good is it!” But “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls” (Prov. 25: 28)

- **“Vain talkers”** (*mataiologos*) means ‘talking idly’. ‘They are adept at fluent and appealing speech, but their talk leads to no constructive good’ (D.E.Hiebert). Solomon has an apt piece here “The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things” (Prov. 15: 28). The true teacher “speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor. 14: 3). Timothy was told, “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Tim. 4: 13). Timothy was also told, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness” (2 Tim. 2: 15-16). But in this case it is more than ‘talking idly’: it is dangerous talk. So:

- **“Deceivers”** (*phrenapates*) means, literally, a mind-deceiver’ (W.E.Vine). Their teaching leads people astray. Compare Col. 2: 6: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye **have been taught...**” There is no deception here!

In view of the nature of their teaching, Paul adds, “whose mouths must be stopped”. He uses a strong word (*epistomizo*) meaning ‘to bridle...metaphorically of stopping the mouth, putting to silence’ (W.E.Vine). We are not told exactly how this was to be accomplished. D.E.Hiebert is possibly right in saying that ‘when they sought to get a public hearing for their doctrines in the assembly, they were to be forbidden to talk, not be given an opportunity to use their deceptive speech on the people’. Hiebert is probably nearer the truth in continuing, ‘A more effective way to gag them would be to use the truth on them, as our Lord silenced the Sadducees (Matt. 22: 34) by holding up the truth before them so decidedly and powerfully that no further opposition was possible’. This certainly agrees with the elders’ use of “sound doctrine” in convincing “the gainsayers” (v9).

iii) The effect of the teachers, v11. “Who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake”. The word “subvert” (*anatrepo*) means ‘to turn over’ or ‘upset’. It occurs in 2 Tim 2: 18, “overthrow the faith of some”. (A different word (*katastrophe*) is translated “subvert” in 2 Tim 2: 4).

We should notice that the false teachers target “houses”. The expression “whole houses” means ‘households’. It is not difficult to discern the strategy of these people. If they can infiltrate the homes of God’s people, then they will have just the opening they need to secure a following in the assembly. Enlarging this a little, the homes of the Lord’s people can so easily become hotbeds of discontent where trouble for the assembly is allowed to brew. C.H.Spurgeon warned against people who drank tea and talked vitriol!

In this case, the motive is base gain: it was “for filthy lucre’s sake”. The term “filthy lucre” is always used in the context of religious teaching for gain. See 1 Tim 3: 3; 1 Tim. 3: 8; Titus 1: 7 (an overseer must not be “given to filthy lucre”); 1 Pet. 5: 2. As D.E.Hiebert rightly observes, ‘The majority of the false teachers would soon stop if their evil work did not produce financial profits’. Paul contrasts his ministry with the activities of the false teachers in saying, “For we are not as many, which corrupt (make a trade of) the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (2 Cor. 2: 17).

iii) The answer to their teaching, vv13-14. “Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth”.

There is some difference of opinion over the identity of the people who are to be ‘rebuked sharply’. Bearing in mind that the word “rebuke” (*elencho*, meaning ‘convict’) is used earlier in the chapter with reference to ‘convincing the gainsayers’ (v9), some feel that Paul refers here to the false teachers. They are to be ‘rebuked, that they may be sound in the faith’. However, this does seem unlikely. It implies that they are true believers, and this is evidently not the case (v16). We tell false teachers to ‘get saved’, not “to be sound in the faith!”

On the other hand, the words, “Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith”, could be understood with reference to both false teachers and true believers. So “rebuke them (the false teachers) sharply; that they (the believers) may be sound in the faith”.

A third suggestion seems more tenable. In the words of D.E.Hiebert, ‘The recipients of the rebuke are the members of the churches who are in danger of being deceived by these deceivers’. This view is supported by the fact that the people to be rebuked are not to give “heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth” (v14). So the people concerned must be the

recipients of the false teaching, **not** the Jewish teachers. Paul speaks similarly to the Galatians: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into (in) the grace of Christ unto another gospel..." (Gal. 1: 6). As noted above, the word "rebuke" means 'convict'. Not merely telling the offender of his guilt, but convicting him of his guilt. It is "rebuke...sharply". The word "sharply" (*apotomos*) signifies abruptly, curtly, literally, in a manner that cuts...hence sharply, severely' (W.E.Vine). The adjective occurs in Heb. 4: 12, "sharper than any two-edged sword..." The word is associated with a surgeon's knife. A surgeon's knife is employed in cutting away diseased and mortifying flesh to ensure continuing health, and Titus was to exercise a similar spiritual ministry amongst the Lord's people in Crete. The spiritual health of God's people was of paramount importance: "that they may be sound in the faith". The word "sound" (*hugiaino*) finds its place in our English 'hygienic'. John prayed that the material health and prosperity of Gaius might match his spiritual health! "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest be in health and prosper, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 2). Now there's good spiritual health for you!

Since God's people are to be "sound in the faith", it is important that they avoid unhealthy teaching. "Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth" (v14). The emphasis is upon unsound **religious** talk. The effect of good teaching ("that they may be sound in the faith") is contrasted with the effect of unsound teaching ("that turn from the truth"). We are told that the verb is in the 'middle voice, and can therefore be rendered, 'that keep on turning themselves away from the truth'.

The word "fables" (*muthos*) means 'myths' and is the exact opposite of *logos* meaning trustworthy, factual and reliable. 'These Cretan deceivers, Paul points out, are spreading "fables" or myths. Their teachings are simply fictitious inventions, without factual basis...These fables are but "the commandments of men". They lack divine authorisation; hence are spurious' (D.E.Hiebert). The Lord Jesus condemned the religious leaders of His day for "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15: 9), referring to their ritualistic observances which had no foundation in Scripture. It has to be said that Christendom is no different. Myths and fables abound, and so do "the commandments of men" which have no basis whatsoever in Scripture. Rome excels in this.

We must all emulate Jeremiah who said, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15: 16). Jeremiah had no time for "fables, and commandments of men", but he had plenty of time for the word of God!

b) Unsound in thought, v15

“Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even (‘both’, RV) their mind and conscience is defiled”. We have, therefore two categories of people: **(i)** the “pure” (*katharos*). The word means ‘free from admixture’; **(ii)** the “defiled and unbelieving”.

It does seem that the words, “Unto the pure all things are pure”, relate to the “Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth” (v14). Amongst other things, these “commandments of men” included dietary regulations leading the Lord Jesus to say, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man” (Matt. 15: 11). Consequently, for the believer, “every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4: 4). But according to the false teachers, following Judaism, those who kept their external regulations were considered pure, and those who did not were condemned as impure and unclean.

But Paul now demonstrates that it is the nature of the inner life that is important. ‘The true criterion lies not in these external non-moral things, but in the nature of the inner life’ (D.E.Hiebert). People who are “defiled and unbelieving” infect everything about them. Hence, “from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts...” (Mark 7: 21-23). The words “mind” and “conscience” denote the whole inner life. ‘Their rational nature and intellectual apprehension are perverted by inner defilement, and their conscience has lost its sense of discrimination between what is innocent and what is sinful. By the test of their inner nature they stand condemned’ (D.E.Hiebert). The “mind” is the seat of understanding and the “conscience” is the seat of inner testimony. The word “defiled” (*miaino*, used twice) means, literally, ‘to stain, to tinge or dye with another colour...hence to pollute, contaminate, soil, defile’ (W.E.Vine). There is no purity of motive: the people concerned are intent on turning from the truth. Sadly, we have all known people to whom ‘nothing is pure’. They trade in innuendo and *double entendre*. Timothy was told, “keep thyself pure (hagnos)” (1 Tim. 5: 22).

c) Unsound in works, v16

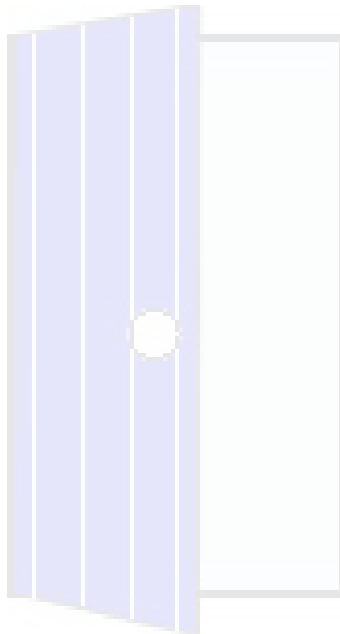
“They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate...” We should notice that “they profess that they know God”. Men who ‘speak the language’ are always most dangerous! Compare 2 Tim. 3: 5, “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof”. D.E.Hiebert sums it up nicely: ‘Paul, like John, knows that whenever there is a conflict between a man’s talk and his walk, it is always his walk, not his talk, that truly reveals what he is’

The word “abominable” (*bdeluktos*: the noun occurs, for example in Luke 16: 15) means ‘an object of disgust’; “disobedient” (*apeithes*) means ‘unwilling to be

persuaded'; "reprobate" (*adokimos*) means 'not standing the test - not approved of God. The word is used primarily of metals. It is translated "castaway" in 1 Cor. 9: 27.

They profess (confess) that they know (have perceived) God, that is, with their **lips**, "but in **works** they deny him". Compare Eph. 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them". It has been nicely said, that 'we are saved by faith alone, but that the faith that saves is not alone'. Compare 1:16 with 2: 7; 2: 14; 3: 1; 3: 8; 3: 14.

How careful we have to be in ensuring that our words are not drowned by our actions. What we say may be right, but are **we** right?



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