

The Pastoral Epistles

Titus 1:13-16 – “<sup>13</sup>This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, <sup>14</sup>not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.”

There are two individual paragraphs that flow together quite naturally here. Verses 10-12 form a complete thought, but verses 13-16 carry on the context into well set up instruction. If we consider how this letter is flowing so far, we see a logical progression from Titus’s need to appoint men of outstanding Christian character as pastors, to a warning about those of Jewish backgrounds who have adapted to Cretan cultural norms in propagating lies, to now God’s instruction on how to handle those who are bringing such erroneous teaching into the church.

Paul starts by affirming the island prophet’s own saying of “The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.” Because that is true, strong and direct correction must take place. He says, “rebuke them sharply....” This is a command to make a direct and harsh confrontation of their sin. This isn’t the slow approach, nor is it a subtle encouragement. It is blunt and offensive. As a matter of fact the word translated *rebuke* is used in other Greek works as, causing shame.

There are two reasons Paul gives to be this harsh: 1) that they would correct their incorrect doctrine, and 2) that they would cease their devotion to both Jewish myths, and the legalism of those departing from truth. Number one seems pretty straight forward, but number two is a little difficult to make out.

What are Jewish myths? There was a common practice among the Jews on Crete to take an obscure character of the Old Testament and create an elaborate story of their importance that seemed to clearly indicate the fact that they had special insight into the Scriptures. These “mysteries” were effective in gaining attention and manipulating people’s beliefs. A modern example of this may be the Hebrew code, a method of interpreting Scripture based on assigning numbers to the Hebrew alphabet. It was popularized during the 90s, and led to remarkable prophecies.

What about legalism of those departing the faith? This seems connected to the Jewish myths. If you have bought into a strange hermeneutic, you develop strange rules for religious practice. There seems little doubt that the Cretans had used their understanding of the myths to place a burden of legalism upon their followers. A modern example of

this kind of thing could be any cult leader. Often they believe to have special insight, and they proceed to convince a group to follow them. One specifically would be the Branch Davidians, led by David Koresh. He claimed to be the messiah, and led many to ruination because of their loyalty to him.

So, how is it that people would follow a maniac? Why would someone give credence to a bazaar Bible interpretation? Paul says in the very next verse, "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." When your mind and conscience is influenced by sin, is there any hope of correct understanding?

What about to the pure? The idea is that those who walk in righteousness tend to understand things righteously. Remember the perspectives of the disciples when Mary broke the box of ointment and anointed the head of Jesus? Or when they brought the children to Jesus? And these were basically righteous men.

On the other end of the spectrum we have the ungodly who even "profess to know God, but they deny him by their works." Their walk doesn't match their talk. In today's world you see this among those that were like the Cretan believers, they were legalistic, working to achieve righteousness rather than working because of their righteousness. In summary Paul says that they are

Detestable – abominable; repulsive

Disobedient – non-compliant; cannot be molded

Unfit for any good work – worthless to achieve any good.

There are some in churches today who have this character. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. We want to be challenged to be committed to the Savior. Not wavering. Not drifting.