

God Blueprint for a Healthy Church
Dealing with the Divisive
Titus 1:10-16
July 9, 2017

We are continuing our summer series, “God’s Blueprint for a Healthy Church” based on the New Testament book of Titus. Titus is a letter written by the apostle Paul to one of his disciples, traveling companions, and coworkers who helped Paul in his apostolic ministry. Last week we saw that Paul left Titus in Crete, to put things in order, including appointing elders. Today we look at the reason Paul wanted Titus to appoint elders, “Dealing with the Divisive” from 1:10-16.

BI – Elders protect the church by correcting false teachers, seeking to restore them to sound faith.

Last week we saw that elders are ordinary men who exemplify godliness, sound doctrine, teaching, and discipling others. Scripture tells us that it is a good thing to desire to be an elder. Maybe God will put it on your heart to pursue eldering as a result of this series in Titus. I want to review the structure of the passage with you before we read. In verses ten through twelve, Paul gives Titus a description of the false teachers, they are insubordinate, empty talkers, and deceivers; the damage they are doing by upsetting whole families; and what must be done, silence them. In verses thirteen to fourteen, he gives Titus the specific action he must take, he must rebuke them with the hope of restoring them to sound in the faith. Then in verses fifteen to sixteen, he summarizes the issue with the false teachers, and each of us, as a heart issue.

Verse ten is connected to verses five through nine with the word “for;” whenever you see a ‘for’ you need to ask yourself, “what is it there for?” Titus is to appoint elders with godly character who are devoted to and can teach the trustworthy word *for* or *because* there are many false teachers. He describes these false teachers¹ three ways: insubordinate, empty talkers, and deceivers. First, they are insubordinate, that is, they are rebellious, they do not submit to the authority of the trustworthy word (9) nor the authority of church (1 Tim 6:3-5). They do not submit to God’s word nor God’s leaders but instead look to Jewish myths and the commands of people, manmade rules. Secondly, they are empty talkers, meaning they use big words, create new words, or redefine biblical words. Third, they are deceivers (2 Tim 3:13), usually with enough truth to it that they sound true. Jesus tells us that Satan is the father of lies (Jn 8:44). Paul calls the teaching of the false teachers the doctrine of demons (1 Tim 4:1-3) that draws people away from Christ and his church.

Then he describes the primary group who are peddling this false teaching, “the circumcision party (10).” The early church started with Jews who became Christians. Some blended the gospel with Judaism, creating a Jesus plus gospel that was neither Jewish nor Christian. They taught that to be a Christian, one must believe in Jesus plus obedience to parts of the Mosaic Covenant – Jesus plus circumcision, Jesus plus the ceremonial laws, Jesus plus Sabbath, etc. It appears that they were adding Jewish myths (14; see also 1 Tim 1:4, 4:7; 2 Tim 4:4) and manmade rules (14) that were not biblical. Anytime you add or subtract to the gospel to save or sanctify, the gospel becomes perverted and is no longer the gospel (Gal 1:6). We all have a tendency to interpret our faith through the grid of our own life, our culture, and religious background.

Then Paul describes the damage they are doing, “they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach (11).” This false teaching is overturning the faith of whole families. Here is what I think is happening. The false teachers were going from house to house or family to family teaching their false doctrine. Parents, you are the primary bible teacher in your home.

Then he describes their motive, they are teaching for shameful gain (11). It is shameful because it is false. Then he supports his claim by quoting one of their own, Epimenides, who said that “Cretans are always liars so you can’t trust them; evil beasts, who have no moral compass; and lazy gluttons, they live to eat (12).” He identifies a true stereotype that the Cretans readily accepted for support. Doctrinal corruption always stems from moral corruption. False teachers must be silenced because

¹ Someone can be wrong in what they teach and not be a false teacher. A false teacher is someone who regularly teaches what is contrary to orthodoxy.

they are morally corrupt and their teaching is perverting the gospel and undermining the mission of the church. But here is the problem, they look and act like sheep (Acts 20:28-31) and are likeable people.

Then Paul tells Titus what the elders must do, “rebuke them sharply *that* they may be sound in the faith (13).” Sharp is a strong word, meaning severely, like a surgeon cutting out a cancerous growth (2 T 4:1-3; 2:24-26) to save the patient. He is almost militant yet very pastoral. Rebuking and correcting is the most loving action to take with those who are on a path to destruction and who are negatively influencing others. This rebuke is severe but it has a good, redemptive purpose, *that* (purpose) they may be sound, healthy, in faith because “they have turned away from the truth (14).” The goal of rebuking is restoration to the faith. The implication is that at one time they were part of the faith (1 T 4:16). Rebuking is a double edge sword. The elders are to rebuke the false teachers because what they are teaching is no longer the gospel, not Christian. At the same time, the elders are protecting the doctrinal and moral purity of the church.

Then he gives this summary statement, which is the key to it all. “To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled (FT) and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works (15-16).” The difference between those who are pure and defiled, is belief (15). Paul is making a distinction between those who are Christians and the false teachers who are not. The pure are believers who been washed and renewed by the Spirit (3:5) while the defiled have not; “they profess to know God but they deny him by their works, that is they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work (16).” The fruit of their lives, their lifestyle negates any claim to faith in Christ, no matter how sincere it is. Paul had a zero tolerance policy when it came to false teachers. So, told Titus to appoint elders to protect the church by correcting false teachers with hope of restoring them to sound faith. Elders feed the sheep and fend of the foes.

