

Courageous Leadership, p.1

Beautifying the Bride, p.3

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Bible Text: Titus 1:10-16

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Well, grab your Bibles this morning and let's go back to Titus and resume our study through this powerful New Testament epistle. This is a continuation of "Beautifying the Bride," as Paul writes his pastoral epistles, 1st and 2nd Timothy and then Titus, to men who he's leaving in charge of getting the churches in order, set up right, running right, the right purpose, the right procedures, etc., etc., so that the bride, the church, might properly be adorned, might properly glorify him. A beautiful local church bride brings honor and fame and glory to the groom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we're in Titus and Paul, um, has already spoken to Titus, or written to Titus in chapter 1, uh, verse 5. He says, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set things in order. Titus, you're going to be on this Greek island. I'm going to put you there so that you can go around to the various churches and all the cities on this island and get things structured right and functioning right." What we're going to find out from our text today, and we'll just get started, I'm gonna stop a third of the way through so we can take the Lord's Table this morning, but we're gonna find out that this was a rather difficult, if not daunting, task. The churches on the island of Crete were in terrible shape and the culture of the Cretans was a terrible culture, to try to build a church out of, you might say. So he says, "I want you to set things in order, try to get these churches straightened up, uh, and, uh, the first thing I want you to do," last part of verse 5, "and appoint elders in every city as I have directed you." Two things there. Number 1, godly, faithful, competent leadership is essential for the churches to be set in order, for the churches to be structured right and to function properly according to God's will.

Now he says, "Titus, set these churches in order and appoint elders as I directed." The idea there is there's a way God wants this done. God has standards and requirements. It's not up to Titus to put his finger in the air and find out what the, uh, current cultural breezes in Crete were looking for in a church or in a pastor. No, that's not an option. "No, Titus, you're to do it as I directed." We don't necessarily need clever men or culturally relevant men or cute or humorous men. We need the right kind of men according to the truth of God. And that's what he lays out and that's what we looked at last time in verses 6 through 9 as Paul lays out the spiritual character qualities that must be in a man if he's going to be appointed as an elder in God's local church.

And then we get to verse 9 in the last part of verse 9 and he says this, "so that he," that's the elder you appoint in a particular church, "will be able to both exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict." So he goes from verses 6 through 9A talking about the qualifications, the characteristics a man must have to be an elder, then he starts in the latter half of verse 9 saying, "and here's the activities, the ministry work he's going to be needing to do in these churches," and he lists those strong phrases of, um, exhorting sound doctrine and refuting those who contradict. That's not an easy thing to do. That's not a tea party in the park. It's going to be a tough job for these men Titus leaves in these churches.

Now we get to our text and he really lays out how challenging and how difficult it's going to be and let's just read it together and I'll give you I. and that's all we'll do today. All right. Beginning in verse 10.

10 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, 11 who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. 12 One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." 13 This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. 15 To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. 16 They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

All right. I. Here's here's actually what I want to do. I want to take this section and I want to put, um, the items Paul lists. He lists, uh, these various components or aspects of the condition of the churches and the culture and then he lists various components of how the elder is to deal with those things. And that's the way I'm going to compartmentalize them. I'm going to pull out of these verses, the list of the components or aspects that describe the church's conditions and the cultural condition, and then we'll, next time we're together, Lord willing, we'll lay out the list of those aspects that speak of how the elder is to respond and deal with churches and a culture that is like this.

All right, so we begin with I., the first list, if you will, the deep incursion of false teaching into the churches. There's this deep, uh, incursion. I use the word incursion because that means a like an enemy incursion. It's it's it's an evil. It's it's a contradictory thing that's come into our churches. Now you might think and say, "Pastor, you went through 1st Timothy, you went through 2nd Timothy and over and over and over again, Paul is talking about wrestling, struggling, standing against, fighting against and removing when necessary, false teachers and false teaching from the church. And here we go, we start Titus and he's back on it again. You just keep bringing it up." Yes, that's because Paul keeps bringing it up. That's because it always continues to be a challenge.

Why do you think we see our mainline denominations, United Methodist, Southern Baptist and many Presbyterian, uh, varying denominations who had such noble and godly, Christ-centered, thoroughly biblical foundations and now today they're discussing whether or not men can marry men. An abomination of abominations, whether or not outwardly flamboyant men who've given themselves to lust for other men can fill the pulpits in those churches. That's why brothers and sisters, you better stop the moose when his nose first comes into the tent. It's the little foxes that spoil the vineyard. You better have a backbone like a saw log and draw a line in the sand and say, "Not in this church." Now we'll be loving, we'll be compassionate. By the way, I don't care what a man, how bizarre and how detestable and how vile a man may give himself over to certain pursuits, there's still a person made in the image of God. They still need our love and our compassion, but that does not mean we celebrate wickedness. There's a difference in those things.

And so maybe when you're dealing with the culture that Paul describes, by the way, Paul was not politically correct. Paul was not woke. Paul characterized a people with blazingly defaming descriptions because they deserved it. What's he call them? Verse 12. They're liars? No, they're always liars. This is the Apostle Paul. This is the word of God. Aren't you glad your ancestors don't come from Crete? How's your heritage? Well, they're always liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons. Kind of kind of pointed there. We have communities in our country that are beginning to deserve blazing, crash, bold denunciations because that's what they are and that's what they deserve.

Well, the point Paul's making is it's a tough field. It reminds me of my days in a graduate school over in Memphis when, um, a lot of the boys there in the seminary would pastor little churches in the Mississippi delta and they would come in talking about how difficult the culture was. Just the alcoholic problem, the the drug problem, the abuse, the, uh, the lack of industry and and lack of a work ethic and it just, it was just a very degraded, uh, lazy, gluttonous, indulgent community and they'd say it's just so hard to deal with people in those communities. Well, probably it was much worse in Crete.

Let's take it now. Let's unpack it one aspect at a time as Paul points out, the type of stuff that's encroaching into the church life that Titus and the elders he appoints must uproot and remove from church life. Verse 10, first of all, he says, "there are many rebellious men." You know what a rebel is? It's simply one who is insubordinate. It means it's the idea of a man who refuses to be under rule, refuses to be under the authority of another. Again, do we not have in our culture today the movement that no one else dare ever tell me anything that I must or must not do. I will be my own God. I will be my own authority. I will establish for myself what's right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. As the Bible says, every man does what is right in his own eyes. They use the phrase today, "Well, not according to my truth. This is my truth." Folks, you can't have a sane society when everybody is their own God and has their own definition of truth. We have to have a moral ethic and so this is a satanic force that's behind rebelliousness.

So Paul says in the churches here, there are these rebellious men, unruly, will not submit to rule or authority. Let me just say to you, brothers and sisters, in love but in clarity this

morning, you don't need to join a church if you don't intend to submit to the elders of that church. You say, "Well, they're just mere men." Yeah, but they're men called to do a job. And I've told you this through the years, and I think a lot of you have done this through the years because I have experienced the chastening and humbling and sharpening and sanctifying work of God in my life I think partly, at least because you've done this. Well, what is the "this" I'm referring to? I've told you through the years, get on your knees and say, "God, I'm going to honor my pastor and follow my elders. Now You keep them right. God, You keep them right." Wives, you need to learn that too. "God, I'm gonna submit to this man in all things and honor him. Now, God, You keep him right." You better quit trying to make your husband right. You better turn him. He's too big for you, but he's not too big for God. Your pastor, your elders may be too, but they're not too big for God.

I believe that moves the heart of God because the Bible says in Hebrews 17, 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account." Obey them and submit to them. Why? Because it's best for you. They keep watch over your souls and they will give an account you will not have to give. They have a responsibility. I've told people through the years, I tell young pastors this all the time, it's not about you having an authority, it's about God giving you a responsibility and an accountability that no one else in the church bears or carries. Do you want to stand? Any of you this morning want to walk to this pulpit and say, "I'll tell you what, get Jeff Noblit out of the way or whoever it might be, I'm taking charge here and I'll give an account to God for the precious eternal souls that stand under me this day." I don't think there's any of you that want to do that. Not if you take it seriously.

Well, the brash, beast-like culture of Crete had a lot of men who would have that kind of attitude and rush into the churches and say, "I'll tell you what, I'll have my way and I'll have it this way and I want to get in charge here and I want to be in charge there," and Paul said, "That's the first of the problems I want to outline, rebellious men." And you know what I found through the years and thank God this spirit is just not in Grace Life Church. It's just not. I have strong men in this church. Men who run large companies and have great authority in the community and, by the way, they ought to have it and God's given it to them and I want them to lead like men. But when they come into this church, you know what I get from those men? I get, "Yes sir. No sir." I don't in the human realm deserve that necessarily but they believe the Bible. They're not rebellious men. They understand authority. And you're not right with God until you understand authority and trust that God works through those he's placed in authority over you.

Well, these kind of folks didn't believe that. There are many rebellious men. Now he elaborates further, "empty talkers," he says in verse 10. That's the idea of profitless talking. They talk when it has no real constructive good to it. They just, they're just talking. I guess just to get attention, just to get a hearing when they're actually saying almost nothing. When I was a young preacher, I would always get amused when I would hear folks talk about church fights. You know, churches that get in a dispute and they had divisions and and often it was over the color of the carpet or the color of the paint of the church or or whatever it might be. I remember distinctly as a young pastor, I was again in graduate school in Memphis and I would often attend the Bellevue Baptist Church in

Memphis on Wednesday nights and hear Dr. Adrian Rogers preach, and they were building a grand new complex out in East Memphis. I mean a huge beautiful thing and Dr. Rogers got in the pulpit one night and I was there. He said, "All right, how many of you want to have maybe blue colored carpet in the new auditorium we're building?" About half the people raise their hand. He said, "How many of you would like to have something maybe a red colored carpet?" And about half the people raised their hand. He said, "That's why we're gonna have the carpet the color I want it to be." Well, that's that's what Dr. Rogers said and I thought, well, you know, really if you put people, if you put everything up for grabs like that you just got to fight. So we appoint one lady in our church and she picks out everything because she's queen of the universe here. No, she's a precious and humble lady and she does a good job with other ladies and they do our decorating and we just enjoy it. Amen. I mean why do you have to have a committee of 27 folks to wait out waste all kind of time on stuff like that?

Empty talkers who just talk about all kinds of things. Calvin said this phrase means they're absorbed in unprofitable subtleties. They're involved in frivolous speculations and often this was surrounding doctrinal points that are just, you know, what came first the chicken or the egg kind of stuff. But they would try to build movements on this empty talking. He elaborates further, not only empty talkers, and they're also deceivers. The idea here behind this Greek word is is a tricking of the mind. They're they're often and he continues in verse 10 especially those of the circumcision. So the point he's saying is, "More times than not, Titus, the trouble making in the churches comes from those Jewish folks who bring their learning of the Old Testament Scriptures into the church but they misuse it and they're actually deceiving to get their own following and have their own way." So these were Jewish leaders perhaps who had been converted or at least professed to be converted to Christ. They knew the Old Testament law and they used it to gain a hearing but then they seductively led their hearers into the error of false doctrine.

And there's certainly no shortage of this very thing in our day today. They may not be Jewish in orientation but deceptive and sneaking in false doctrine is commonplace in our age. These are folks, brothers and sisters, who use the same Christian terms we may use, they throw around the same Scriptures that we might use, their presentations seem plausible especially if they can get you to think through your emotions, but they are mind-trickers. That's what the word is. They're tricksters. They're up to something. And here's a key. "Pastor, well, how will we know if they seem impressive and they seem plausible, how will we know if they're really up to something?" Sometimes it's hard to know. That's why I hope you feel there's safety in the fact that I've been here 42 years. I think if I was up to something it would be known by now.

So how do you know? Well look at their lives and see how much they tend to change their doctrine when the culture changes. How much do they massage and and kind of bend the corners on teaching of morality and truth when the culture begins to demand such a thing? How much do they change when there's a threat to the number of their followers or the amount of their finances or a blow to their popularity? Paul said, "Titus, says you place these men in these churches, they're gonna, they're gonna have to be courageous men." And by the way, that's why I've entitled this section "Courageous

Leaders." We talked about competent leaders in verses 6 through 9. Now we're talking about courageous leaders more specifically in verses 10 through 16.

He says in verse 11, the last part of verse 11, these guys come in and they're "teaching things they should not teach." In other words, again, uh, maybe he's redundant, maybe he just wants to get the point across, those things that contradict sound doctrine.

Then their motive comes out here. He says "for the sake of sordid gain." The motive is sordid gain. It means a base gain, a lower just worldly earthly approach to work in the church. This whole thing of, um, came out years ago in the in the so-called church growth movement where, uh, you had to be sensitive to felt needs. You had to find out, they would say survey your community and find out what they feel they need and then you as a church begin to meet that need. Why? As if God has no opinion on any of this. How could that, that's being man-centered and not God-centered and certainly not Scripture-centered. That's the stuff we're talking about. It's just a base common thing instead of the high and lofty and glorious and dignified goals that Scripture gives the true church.

So in other words, these are guys who are not ultimately glory of God-focused but they're glory of self-focused. All good and godly pastors, by the way, all good and godly pastors have to contend with selfish motives in their own hearts but they do contend. That's the key. Your pastors are repenters just like you are repenter and when we catch pride and when we catch self-exaltation, or self-glorious motives, we need to contend with those and continually take them to the altar of God and slay them again before the Lord. I'll just be honest with you. I I didn't want to preach this text. It's just, it's weighty, it's heavy, it's it's pointed, it has a brashness, a holy brashness. It's, could I use the word caustic? It's just, it's just I didn't want to preach it and it's almost like God said, "Who cares? Okay, you don't want to preach this this week but it's in My word and so you be faithful to what I've called you to do." And that's why expositional preaching chapter by chapter, verse by verse through books of the Bible must be the mainstay of the pulpit. It keeps us out of our ruts and off of our hobby horses and causes us to deal with what Paul told the Ephesian elders he was commending his ministry to them when he said, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." And that's what I've purposed to do for you brothers and sisters.

Well, these false teachers were not those who contended against the pride and selfish motives that we find in our fallen flesh and our fallen hearts. No, these guys were constantly looking for a new angle to advance their popularity, to extend their control, and as always to fill their pockets. They needed a heart like Paul in Acts 20:33. Again, he's talking to the churches of the, uh, the elders rather of the church at Ephesus and he says in Acts 20:33, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. I didn't come here to gain any of that. I came here to build a true church for God's glory." You know what I found through the years? If you'll forget about that as a leader, just forget about those things and just strive to build true churches, God will really bless you with those things. He'll give you a people that joy in taking good care of their pastors and joy because they know it's biblical and it honors the Lord.

Well, now we get to verse 12. Paul says, "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.'" By saying "one of themselves," Paul says, "I'm going to take a notable and popular teacher, so when they even, the Cretans, are called a prophet from their past, and I'm gonna give you what he says about himself or themselves." So Paul is giving an unbiased opinion here. He's bringing one of their own people out, uh, Epimenides is the name of the guy he's quoting, according to the scholars. He was a heathen moralist of about 600 BC. And so Paul says, "You know, he's one of the those guys that you Cretans view as a honored prophet. Well, here's what he says you are." So that was a scathing indictment or commendation of his own countrymen when he said these Cretans, you know, in contrast to generally the people of the world as we know them, they're always liars, evil beast and lazy gluttons. Ah, what a place to plant a church.

So three things here. First of all, he says they're always liars. It's the idea of perpetually and incessantly lying. It doesn't mean that you told a lie, it means you embrace and purpose and plan to lie as an approach to life. They were so known for this that the Greeks even coined a word, *cretizo*, which means to be like the Cretans, to lie. So to lie was to be a Cretan. The same idea that we have when, uh, the word Corinth, to Corinthianize meant to commit sexual immoralities because it was so prominent in the culture. But not only are they always liars, and by the way, it just it made me think back to, um, being on mission trips in some third world countries where the people actually gloried in their capacity to scheme, manipulate, lie and get by with it. And the better you are, the more esteemed you were. It it was just a lying culture. And I thought, man, America's got a lot of problems, but we haven't gotten that far, but we're working to get there fast.

He says not only always liars, they're evil beasts and the idea here is is a dangerous, a wild beast. They had many in their culture that had a wild, fierce nature and love of cruelty. They would not tolerate anyone to speak against or resist them in their quest to fulfill their fallen lust. Did you hear that? They would not tolerate anyone to try to stand against them or speak against them as they endeavored to fulfill their fallen lust.

Keep your Bible reading ribbon in Titus and go back to Genesis with me. Would you do that? Genesis chapter 13. We'll just hit on this so you can see the consistency of the Bible in these things. Genesis chapter 13 and look at verse 11 through 13. Genesis 13:11 through 13. Abraham and Lot, their herdsmen are quarreling and not getting along, so they're gonna split up. Verse 11, "So Lot chose for himself," this is Genesis 11, uh, 13, did I say 11? 13:11. Did I say it backwards? Genesis 13:11, "So Lot chose for himself the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward and they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom." You don't ever want to cast your tents in Sodom. Verse 13, "Now the men of Sodom were wicked exceedingly and sinners against the LORD." And yes, that is talking specifically about the sin of men giving themselves over to follow the lust for other men. They were not born that way. That's not what they are. It's a pursuit of a pleasure they've decided to give themselves to. That is lusting for other men.

Now look, if you will, to Genesis chapter 19. Would you do that? Genesis chapter 19, verses 5 and verse 9. Again, so much here to unpack, but we're just going to hit on the major principle here. Genesis 19, verse 5, "and they called to Lot and said to him, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight?'" Two angels came, they looked like common men. So here the citizens of Sodom are coming out saying, "Where are those men? Bring them out to us so that we may have relations with them. Bring these men out. We want to use these men for our perverse, unnatural sexual lust." That's what was dominant in the city. That's what made them exceedingly wicked before the Lord. Now, if you will, look at verse 9. "But they said, 'Stand aside.' Furthermore, they said, 'This one, uh, came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge; now we will treat you worse than them.' So they pressed hard against Lot and came near to break the door." They would not tolerate anyone resisting them in their quest to fulfill their ungodly lust.

Brothers and sisters, this is America. "We want these men, gotta have them." Except now they're coming up to the schoolhouse door, "We want the children. We demand to have them." And they're knocking on your door, moms and dads, "We want your babies. We want to make them like us." Evil beasts, Paul said. Fierce. Harsh. Violent. Don't be surprised when people give themselves over to unnatural affections and evil that they're also very vicious toward their fellow man if they don't get their way. What a picture. Isn't it amazing from Genesis through Crete, through the book of Titus up to today, the nature of men is just the same.

All right, back to Titus chapter 1. All right, Paul says they're, um, always liars, evil beasts, and I'm gonna have to end with lazy gluttons. Lazy gluttons. This is like the culture we have today of self-consumed, self-absorbed, narcissistic young people who think they were put here for whatever they want, whenever they want it, and however they want it, and whenever they desire it, and you better support it and pay for it and keep me up while I'm doing it. That's the idea behind a lazy glutton. It means uncontrolled greed. It means lazy, gross self-indulgence. And that's so like so many of the self-consumed, self-indulgent, narcissistic people we have in our culture today that demands we serve them in their lazy, gluttonous desires.

Now, this bunch has gotten into the church. To some degree, this spirit and people who walk in this has gotten into the church. Now, Paul says, "Titus, go get it cleaned up." So you know what that means? "Titus, your elders you appoint better be courageous men. It's going to take courage because there's gonna be a fierce reaction back, Titus, when you try to deal with these things."

Well, Brother Jeff, that's a pleasant thought for the Lord's Supper today as we think about the sweet and holy unity and oneness of the Lord's Supper, but it actually is a good space, a good spot to step over to the contrast, is it not? You see, the Lord's Table is only the Lord's Table if we are together. You cannot properly partake of the Lord's Supper in your house with your family. You cannot properly partake of the Lord's Supper on retreat with other Christians. It's an ordinance given to God's people in God's church because we're so varied and we come from so many different backgrounds and we have so many different natural, uh, inclinations and desires and likes and dislikes, but when it comes to what God has done for us, all the rest of that fades out into nothingness because

we come to remember our Lord's body and his blood that has cleansed us and purified us and therefore, whatever, now listen to me, whatever might divide us, it's blown away into to insignificance compared to what unites us. God was in Christ and Christ is now in us so there's that God factor. God is in me and I need to share in this Communion, this fellowship of the Lord's Table with the people of God.

The Bible calls it a unity of the Spirit. It's a Spirit-wrought unity that we have. This isn't something that we grit our teeth and say, "Let's do the best we can to get along with each other." No! The Spirit of God brings to my mind afresh the precious blood and the body of Christ that was given for me and so I can say anathema to everything that's against my Lord and against my brothers and sisters. It just doesn't matter. I forgive it. I forget it. We're one because the the Spirit of God reminds me of what really matters. Boy, I want to say this because I say it to Jeff Noblit a lot and I want to say it to you: you're not that important. You're just not. He is and he died for us and so we forget ourselves and take this Supper in unity. It's a spiritual thing. It's a it's a God in us thing and it's a blessed unity. Psalm 133 verse 1, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"

Back to our text. You can have no unity when you've got worldly, unconverted people creeping into the churches who are generally known as always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons. There had to be a cleaning up before they could have a real communion. Well, Jesus, in a sense, has cleaned cleaned us up and fortunately in God's grace we've been about striving the best way we know how following the Scriptures to keep our church a clean body, not perfect, but a clean body for the glory of God and the good of his church. So here we are emphasizing the contrast to what Titus had to deal with, a purified, clean, holy, united people.