

Identification of False Teachers.

Titus 1:10-16

Acts 6:1-7:25

Acts 7:26-60

Psalm 146

This morning we are going to be looking at the last half of chapter 1, in which we are going to see the importance of sound leadership, who teach sound doctrine as we have been looking at over the past few weeks. So let us just go ahead and start this morning by reading our passage, we are going to be focusing on verse 10 and following, but pick up at verse 5. (read 5-16) This list of warnings and descriptors we see of the false teachers who have made their way into the churches Crete is the very reason that Paul sent Titus, we know this because verse 10 is linked directly to everything that came before it, by the word For. He says, you must find leaders who are blameless, hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy and self controlled who hold fast to the word of God FOR there are many who are insubordinate, idle talkers and deceivers.

These are those who are the polar opposite of what Paul said Titus should be looking for, these are people who manipulate and control others for their own gain, bringing glory to themselves not to God. We get a sense here in these verses that this was a large problem, for Paul writes, there are many false teachers. It would seem that Titus would have his work cut out for him which is why he doesn't just go about this alone, but instead of appoint leaders of each congregation who could stand up in truth against the false teaching that had arisen. Just like how Paul listed characteristics of those who should and should not be leaders within the church, he lists here the characteristics of these false teachers, things to be looking out for and prepared for. First he says, they are those who are insubordinate. They are rebellious, believing themselves right are unwilling to listen to opposing ideas or teaching. These are those who did not submit themselves to the authority of the Apostles, and as we can see when we read through this chapter, these are Jewish men, who are pointing people to the law and traditions, away from faith, and towards works and legalism.

The defining trait of these false teachers is that they were unwilling to submit themselves to the truth of the word, they rejected the teaching of the apostles, they rejected the notion of salvation by faith alone, through Christ alone, and we can get a sense in the way that Paul talks about them here that these are not mistaken Jewish Christians, but instead are Jewish men who have come to bring their beliefs, leading the people away from the teachings of Paul and the other Apostles. This is not something that is unique to Crete, really we see this issue arise within the early church in pretty much all of Paul's letters. Warning of those who would bring law, who seek to control, and who take away from the teachings of grace and mercy. There is an arrogance within this mindset, we can see it throughout the entire new testament in Jesus and the Apostles interactions with the leaders of Judaism. Which is why we read the account of Stephen in the book of Acts this morning, to point out that these are the type of false teachers that Titus was dealing with, if we would have kept reading into chapter 8 of Acts, we would have also seen that Paul was there, consenting of the violence against Stephen, and in fact watched over the other men's cloaks as they stoned him.

Now Paul is saying, the teaching of these men is wrong, and Stephen was indeed right, when he said, "you stiff-necked and uncircumcised in the heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed everyone those who foretold the coming of the Just one, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by direction of angels and have not kept it."

Their hearts were haughty, arrogant, and full of rebellion against God. Though here at Crete they may not have been dragging Christians into the street and stoning them, they were using a more sinister underhanded approach of leading people away from the gospel message of Christ, toward their own message of works, and law. We know that this is the case because Paul specifically calls them out here in verse 10, where he says “especially those of the circumcision.” By nature, a pastor-teacher who teaches solid biblical doctrine will work as a shield against those who would come in with such deceptions, for not only is he grounded in the word of God, so will the people be also making it harder to be deceived, harder to be manipulated, and lead astray through various doctrines of men, or being caught up in philosophy, or psychology of the world.

A second characteristics of a false teacher is that they are idle talkers, that is they have nothing of true merit or value to say. Their teaching is empty, they may talk with flowery words, they may be able to make themselves sound important or smart, but in the end of the day there is no substance. Being that their teaching is outside of biblical truths, there is no value, in fact the danger is that it is the opposite, that through such deception they draw people away from truth. They draw people away from the sense of freedom that they have in Christ, away from the sense of security in salvation, and almost always have your freedom, or salvation hinge upon your conduct. Focusing upon the outward reformation in this life, and not the inward reality in the new birth. We can see this in the letter to the Galatian churches, men had come from Jerusalem who were self proclaimed “super apostles” Who were teaching, not to turn aside from Christianity, but to add to it. They said, now that you believe in God, and have Christ, now you need the law and the traditions given by Moses to pursue righteousness and holiness.

Their focus was upon outward reform, not the inward realities of the gentile believers. This faith is an inward change that flows outward, almost every false teaching, or religion teaches that outward reforms will bring inward cleansing creating true holiness. Paul argued in Galatians, that we are already holy, not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done on our behalf. Any teaching that does not point to what Christ has done, and that what he has done is sufficient, is idle talking, empty words, and a deception. Paul warned of this in 1 Timothy, 1:5 “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.” 1 Corinthians 3:18 “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, “he catches the wise in their own craftiness” and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”

And likewise jumping a head in Titus, Paul writes in verse 9 of chapter 3, “avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and useless.” The wisdom of man, is foolishness to God, and the wisdom of God is foolishness to man. These things are incompatible, the teachings of a false teacher lead to nothing but emptiness, despair, and hopelessness. This was the entire point of the law, it was to show that no man can reach holiness, no man is able to make himself pure enough for God. If salvation rested upon our ability, then none would be saved. If our justification, and righteousness was predicated upon our ability to adhere to outward reformation then none would be justified, and none would be righteous. But thankfully, all those things were given to point to the reality that with man, all of these things are impossible, but with God,

nothing is impossible. The new birth which brings about the very thing that false teachers try to manifest through outward focused teaching, is a miracle only made possible by God's enlightenment

By that I mean, without God's revelation, without God bursting into your life and awakening you to these truths, you can not believe, you will not understand, you are incapable of truly knowing him unless he first reveals himself to you. All false teachers, and false religious seek to find enlightenment through physical acts, whether it be the adherence to some laws or traditions, or an attempt to purge oneself of the flesh through manufactured pain and suffering. On the surface false teachers may sound convincing, they may sound wise, but ultimately anything that points us away from Christ is unprofitable, is empty, and has no real meaning or bearing on salvation. Idle talkers are often deceivers, we see this with our politicians, and it has become expected that you won't ever get a straight answer when talking to one, they will find ways to dance around the subject, and give you a whole series of great sounding, flowery words but will always avoid the real answer. They are manipulating because they are pandering to garner the most votes among the people. Paul understood the need to speak plainly, and openly and remain on task focusing upon Christ in his ministry not seeking to convince through great oratory skills, though I am sure he had them since he was a highly educated man from highly respected teachers in the law.

We see this in 1 Corinthians where he writes, "When I came to you, I did not come with excellence of speech or wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." This ministry is not convincing the mind, it is cutting to the heart I think that is something that many forget, and it is only Christ through his word that can do so. Which brings us to the deceivers, those who deliberately seek to lead people astray for their own gain. Having little regard for scripture except only to use it as a tool in their manipulation. This deception comes from Satan, if he can deceive even the elect, he will try.

Deceivers are liars, they are cheats, and ultimately tools of Satan to sew discord and strife in the faith. Throughout the new testament we see the strife that is caused by those who came in after the Apostles into the Gentile churches and sought to bring law, saw to diminish the word of Christ, diminish the work of the holy spirit, saying that grace and faith is not enough you need law, you need traditions, you need ritual to purify yourself. What they were really saying, is that Christ is not enough, and by denial of the one whom God sent, they are saying that God is not enough. Deceivers always want to add on, or take away from the reality of God in scripture. This is why we see them use many words, speak in a manner of wisdom which sounds right but will barely reference scripture, won't teach verse by verse, won't dive into the word of God. Paul warned Timothy of this, we just went through this a few weeks ago, 2nd Timothy 3 Paul says, "evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

In the early church there was a major issue, of men from Jerusalem, Judiasers going into the Gentile churches and undermining the teachings of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That is why the account of Paul and Timothy at Jerusalem was so important, in the end they did not compel Timothy, a Gentile to become circumcised like the Jews finding such a practice unnecessary for Christ's followers. Proving out faith by the grace of God alone, being an internal status

not an external sign. False teachers are not seekers of truth, their heart is focused upon rebellion and self interest. There is a difference between a false teacher and a mistaken teacher. A mistaken teacher is one who may teach something wrong, but learns and grows and rectifies his mistakes. We are all human, we all make mistakes, we all learn and grow...as the old saying goes, I wish I knew before what I know now. It has to do with knowledge, and growth in life, and the same applies to the faith.

But a false teacher, is one who is arrogant, who refuses to learn, refuses to grow convincing you that he knows it all, and is the ultimate authority. They use a form of belief as a manipulation tool, and in the process leave you empty, and weighed down with undo burdens. They consciously defy God and his word, using it deceptively, their talk is idle, there may be many words, but little substance. A mistaken teacher should be handled with grace, as we are all learning, and we are all growing...as we see with Aquila and Priscilla with Apollos, he was not teaching falsely to deceive, but rather was ignorant so Aquila and Priscilla took him aside to “teach him the way of God more accurately” It was done with graciousness, as a fellow brother. But a false teacher, should be ousted, exposed for they are a danger to the church and to the people.

They are not merely mistaken, but rather are teaching heresies, and all heresies come from the father of lies seeking to deceive, seeking whom he may manipulate into believing they are right with God, when in fact they are fully in the clutches of Satan. This is why sound doctrine, biblical teaching, with a focus upon Christ and the gospel ministry is so important. This truly is a life or death matter, a heaven or hell situation, false teachers through deception line the streets to hell with flowery words leading people to destruction. We are to be wise to these things, to be on the lookout for these things, and guard ourselves against such, and as Paul says in verse 11 here, “whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.” Paul not only advises, he demands that such teachers should be stopped, he says, they must be stopped. IF false teachers are allowed to continue great harm and damage is done to a congregation, again as he says, “whole households are deceived.”

This is why it is also important that a church has a structure that protects itself against such. Not letting just anyone take the pulpit. We had someone who was visiting for a time, for quite a while actually and he said, he left because we did not ask him to preach, we did not take advantage of his education and in his words, excellent speaking skills. But as we have been seeing here in this letter, education, ability to speak convincingly, these really aren't characteristics necessary of a good leader, but can at times be characteristics of false teachers. Now don't misunderstand me here...I am not saying all who are educated or affluent in teaching are false teachers just to be wary how easy it is to be deceived. False teachers do damage to a church, causing division, causing deception that leads away from the simple truth of the gospel. Some argue that the households that Paul is mentioning here was the churches themselves, it was common that churches gathered in households, and it is thought that is what Paul is meaning here, false teachers embedding themselves within these congregations and leading entire churches astray.

Who you have as a teacher, who you allow to preach and lead the congregation is not a small matter, for as I said in the past few weeks, the leader sets the culture of the church, if Christ focused, then the church will be such, but if the leader is deceptive, manipulative, or cold and arrogant..so to will be the congregation. These things seem to go hand in hand, that is why when we were vetting potential pastoral candidates we insisted they spent some time with us, though their belief and understanding of scripture was top priority, they also needed to fit these characteristics that we see here

in this letter, and in 1st and 2nd Timothy. In the case here in Crete, though we don't know specifics about what these false teachers were teaching, we can get an idea..because Paul says they were “of the circumcision” so we can make an educated guess that it was likely law focused, outward reformation focused teaching, teaching against the free grace of God, and instead putting a weight of bondage on the people through law. But what we do know, is some of the motive, and sadly this is largely the motive of many false teachers.

Paul says, they do so for the sake of “dishonest gain” Right from the start, the motive isn't the gospel, it isn't about Christ, it is about selfish gain. They sought to make dishonest financial profit from their distorted false ministry. It would seem they didn't really care what they believed, as long as they got their money. Putting these 2 things together, men of the circumcision, and false teaching for dishonest gain, I can imagine they taught heavily about tithing, giving to the church, and we see some of that today yet too, false teachers telling people to send them money to be blessed....don't have the money, well donate on faith, God will provide and will bless you mightily if you do. Such teachings destroys whole households as their livelihood is pillaged and plundered and lining the pockets of the false teachers. It would seem something similar was happening here in Crete, that these were the type of false teachers that they were dealing with. These false teachers are scammers, deceivers, whose only motive is to teach what is necessary to make money, they believe that by deceptive words, and convincing people they will gain wealth by their false teaching.

Paul said it, in the account in the book of Acts that we read last week, Acts 20:29 “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.” This is something that has plagued the church from the beginning, and continues to plague the church today. So the take away this morning is that it is all the more important to be Christ centered in our focus, to strive to teach rightly from the word to the best of our ability. So that we may be united together in strength through Christ as a beacon of truth, and hope not only to one another, but to the community at large. So that God's name may be honored, and glorified, that is why we gather and that is what we attempt to do each week...glorify the name of God, remind ourselves who he is, and who we are in him.