

Title: Why the church always has issues
Text: Titus 1.10-16
Theme: Dealing with problems
Series: Titus #2
Prop Stmtnt: Elders have to deal with problems.

Read Text:

Do you ever get disillusioned with church? Do you ever find that you expect a little more commitment, friendliness and consistency from others than what they generally offer? Do you get a little frustrated with some of the attitudes and wonder if there was a church where you could really get the kind of response that you longed for? Do you ever get weary with the fact that it seems that the church always has issues?

When it comes to church, there are basically two approaches you can take. 1) Keep it lite. In other words, don't go deep, don't expect too much. Keep people interested, attracted, kind of engaged, but don't go below the surface. And you know what? For a while, that appears to work. Frankly, there are many people who don't want to talk about real issues, don't want to address the issues of their heart and really aren't interested in being a serious follower of Jesus. Nice, happy, safe and surfacy.

2) Go deep. Wrestle with doctrine and its implications for life. Try to get to know people. Try to help people really grapple with the gospel. Try to help people work through issues in their lives. Try to help people break out of life dominating sins and resolve strained relationships within their families. Try to help people identify deep-rooted sins and life long tendencies and help them with blind spots.

In the first approach, leadership is planning events, service, programs and things that will attract crowds and make them happy and is in fact so busy strategizing events, that they don't do counseling. Churches that keep it lite don't like to get too deep with people cause then its not nice or happy any more. In the second approach, leadership is praying for people, counseling people, and at times confronting people, and regularly teaching in a way that exposes heart issues. The second approach is not as common as the first because the risk is greater. However, Jesus did not die so that we would keep it lite. The language that Jesus used for those who will follow him, (like take up your cross daily and follow me) is not the language of keeping it nice, happy, safe and surfacy. Jesus plays for keeps and calls the church to do the same. But it's hard and you are going to be disillusioned at times, but perhaps I can explain why.

- The gospel is the most important truth in the entire world.
 - o The gospel not only saves us, but the gospel grows us in Christ.
 - o Therefore, the gospel is going to be twisted and attacked

- The church is the God-ordained result of gospel growth.
 - o Churches are the result of people who come to faith.

- Churches are an outpost of the kingdom of Christ and a preview of God's plan for this world.
- Churches are going to be constantly under attack.
- Churches need elders who will defend the church.
 - Elders are going to be constantly under attack.
- Churches need members who will recognize the importance, necessity and role of the church, the importance, necessity and role of elders.

If a church remains true to the gospel and relatively intact for any length of time, it is a minor miracle.

Outline of chapter 1

1.1-4 (The priority of the gospel in God's plan for this world)

1.5-9 (the necessity of qualified elders to teach the gospel and defend the church)

1.10-16 (the important, difficult and messy work of being an elder)

1. **The church attracts troublemakers.** (10)

Look at verse 10. "*For there are MANY who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers...*" Titus had his hands full, didn't he? The churches in Crete had become places where certain people were looking to have a platform where they could try to take over, promote their own inflated view of importance and say things that were frankly, lies. Why was this and why is this still the case?

First of all, there is no shortage of idiots in this world. Have you ever gone to a townhall meeting for a local politician or to a city council meeting? Have you ever gone to a school board meeting that was open to the public? Have you ever gone to a union meeting? In so many of those settings, there are certain people who, if they get the floor, cause most other people to cringe, don't they? The church is not unique in this matter.

One of my favorite lines in the Bible comes at the end of 1 Samuel 21, where David is fleeing for his life and he goes to the city of Gath, which is one of the city states in the land of the Philistines. In an effort to show that he was not really a threat to them (although a few chapters earlier he had killed Goliath and had led a number of successful military incursions against them) David pretended to be insane. Some of the leaders in Gath were concerned about David being there, so they brought him before the king who wanted to know why they did this and said, "Do I lack madmen that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence?"

The point is, this no shortage of idiots in this world. Look at your own family, right? Most of you have a crazy cousin or uncle or two or three of them. So of course, some are

going to wander into the church and try to disrupt things because they try to wander into all sorts of other places and try to disrupt them as well. But, what makes us particularly vulnerable is the fact that we are people of grace. Our default is to welcome, love, care, and accept people. We certainly do not do it perfectly, but we even have greeters at the door who welcome people, not bouncers who stand at the door of the club and only allow those in who fit a certain profile. Therefore, we are perceived as being a rather easy place for others to get an audience.

But, the biggest reason is that we are all sinners. We are all vulnerable to being self-centered, self-righteous, or getting fixated on one or two pet peeves and getting out of balance. And along with that, we all grow up with influences and ideas, some of which are not always correct. So, what is happening in Crete is the fact that there were troublemakers in the churches who were so stubborn that they did not want to listen to anyone. They were insubordinate. There is no place in the church for people who are insubordinate because fundamentally in order to be in the church you have to be a Follower of Jesus Christ. You have to be subordinate to him and we practice submission to Christ even as we submit ourselves to one another. The churches in Crete were also plagued with empty talkers, that is people who liked to hear themselves because they think that what they have to say is so important, when in reality they do not know what they are talking about. But, because they are so determined and strong willed, they are able to deceive others. This was especially true of the people, (presumably of Jewish origin) who were teaching that if you were really going to be spiritual that you had to follow certain aspects of the OT, like circumcision. Later in v.14, Paul says that part of the false teaching they were propagating were Jewish myths which were probably stuff related to genealogies and other related matters that sounded secretive and mystical and special knowledge and insight that no one else had. But all of this stuff is a distraction from the gospel. Telling people that circumcision is necessary is adding to the gospel and anytime you add something to the gospel, you no longer have the gospel. Adding rituals to the gospel means that you have lost the gospel. Telling people that you need Jesus plus the mass, Jesus plus Mary, Jesus plus baptism, Jesus plus speaking in tongues, Jesus plus means that you have lost the gospel. Therefore,

2. **Troublemakers have to be confronted.** (11-14)

There are two commands that Paul gives to Titus in versus 11-14. “*They must be silenced.*” and “*Therefore, rebuke them.*” Wow! How do you think Titus responded when he read this? Titus, you have to shut them up. Titus, you have to confront them. You cannot allow them to be able to speak in church. Therefore, you have to train the elders in those churches to not allow certain people to have the opportunity to be able to speak up in the church. Notice that verse 10 begins with the preposition “for”. The reason for elders is because the elders have to address problems as they arise in the church. So, the way we are to understand this command for the troublemakers to be confronted is that Titus has to train these elders to be willing to confront the troublemakers in the churches.

And what you are looking at right here is without a doubt one of the most difficult and unpleasant aspects of leadership in the church. This is why when the church is selecting

elders, it cannot ignore the qualifications. A man whose life is not consistent with the gospel is not going to be able to address other people correctly. If you are not handling a situation well in your life, then you will either ignore that problem in someone else, or you will overreact about it because of your own guilt. Besides, if your own life is not consistent with the gospel, then when you go to address someone else's problems, they can easily look at you and point out your own failures and ask you what right do you have to talk with them? The other aspect of qualification as an elder is being theologically savvy. Elders have to know theology so they can protect the church from theological error.

In one church, some of the members started inviting other members over to their homes in order to do a Bible study. But, the leaders of the Bible study, while well intentioned did not really know what they were doing and were teaching things that were a little whacky. However, the leadership of the church was not theologically astute enough to sit down and address the problems with what was being taught and were threatened by the situation and tried to squelch the Bible study without explaining why. The whole thing did not end well. But here in Crete, there were people who were intentional about trying to cause people to go astray and the elders have to address this and have to be able to explain what is wrong. The instigators might not listen to the leaders, but the people they are influencing have to be protected. Look at verse 9. The elders have to be able to give instruction in sound doctrine. They have to be able to know what is the gospel and what isn't the gospel and what is going to be a problem for the church.

What is particularly challenging is the fact that there seemed to be a cultural factor that played into this. Cretans were known for being particularly immoral and greedy. There was a prevailing attitude on the island of, "whatever you had to do to make some money – so be it." Cicero was a Roman politician and lawyer who said that "Moral principles are so divergent that the Cretans . . . consider highway robbery honorable." So, (according to v.11) some of these trouble makers were gaining influence in these churches in an effort to exploit people for money. The attitude in Crete would probably have been, "so what if they do that." In other words, it is none of your business to judge that person, this is just how we do it around here. Paul quotes a local poet who commented on the culture of the people that further underscored the fact that sins that affect people all over the world are very prevalent here. Yea, we know we lie. We know we are evil and lazy. So what? When a culture is given over to a particular type of sin, then to stand against that sin is considered to be disloyalty.

For example, the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were characterized by homosexuality. It was not only tolerated, it was enforced. The fact that Lot did not participate in that was held against him and he was resented because he was "not one of them." Brothers and sisters, when you come to faith in Christ, you are no longer one of them, but one with Christ. There are some things that you can no longer do, no matter how disloyal it may appear to be.

Here is what we are going to see in this letter. Part of the problems in the churches in Crete stemmed from the fact that some of the people were lazy and did not work. On the

other hand, there were these false teachers who were most like preaching asceticism, which is what the end of v.14 is probably referring to. So, here is the irony. You have a culture that tends to be lazy and gluttonous. Within these early churches there is a movement of asceticism, meaning they are telling people that you cannot marry or you have to stay away from certain foods, or you have to practice certain rituals in order to be really holy and since these guys are the experts at this, then others are supposed to give them money since they do not have time to work, they have to give themselves to their disciplines. In other words, their disciplines are, ironically, a form of laziness.

The leaders in the churches have to address this and the other problems. But, in so doing, they are going to be taking an unpopular stand. If you get good grades while others do not, you will get mocked for it. If you work hard while others do not you will be asked, “who do you think you are? What are you trying to prove? Do you think you are better than us? Don’t forget where you came from. This stuff has been going on ever since Genesis 3. The job of an elder is to help people follow Jesus better, not get every person to like him. In fact, if you do your job well, then every person is not going to like you.

There are a couple of guys in our church who investigate fraud and when they discover who is responsible, they have to initiate processes that result in people being fired and in some cases arrested. That is not fun to know that your work is going to result in someone’s life getting in trouble, but truth and integrity matters. And it matters in the church above all. Therefore, elders cannot have the goal of making every person like them, because there are times when the elders have to step up and make decisions that are going to upset some people, but if these people are not addressed, then they will continue to harm the other members of the church.

At the end of v.13 Paul says, “rebuke them (referring to the false teachers and trouble makers) that they may be sound in the faith.” This is referring to the people who are being influenced by the troublemakers. The troublemakers themselves will likely not change.

3. **Some troublemakers will not change.** (15-16)

In verse 15 Paul gives us two principles. 1) To the pure, all things are pure. Which means this: If you have become a follower of Christ, then you have been made pure by Christ. Christ came to this earth in order to do for you what you could not do for yourself. Christ lived the life that you could not live and died the death that you could not die. Because the life that Christ lived was perfectly righteous and because Christ is God, his perfectly righteous life was infinitely righteous. Therefore, when he died on the cross he offered up his infinitely righteous life as the payment for your sin. When you come to the place in your life where you surrender yourself to Christ and you accept him as your Lord and Savior, then your sin is removed from you and credited to Christ (who paid for it) and his righteousness is credited to you. You are now pure because of the purity of Christ. You cannot be made more pure. There is no diet that you can follow that will make you more holy because you are already declared righteous because you have been credited with the righteousness of Christ. How could you become more righteous than Christ? How could

not eating hotdogs or eating brussel sprouts make you more righteous? It can't! So do not let anyone tell you that there is some spiritual diet from the OT that will make you better than others. If you are in Christ, you are already pure. But, to the those who are not in Christ, nothing is pure. To the defiled (credited with their sin) and unbelieving (unwilling to follow Christ) it does not matter how disciplined they are. It does not matter how monkish and religious they live, it does not count.

The history of the church (even clear back here in Crete) is the story of the fight for the purity of the gospel. We are always concerned when people try to water it down and deny some of its essential tenants. So, we are right to defend the essential doctrines of the gospel such as the Trinity, of the deity of Christ, the humanity of Christ, the incarnation of Christ, the sinlessness of Christ, the substitutionary, wrath-absorbing, sin-atonement death of Christ, the burial and resurrection of Christ, the ascension of Christ and the return of Christ. We are right to believe and defend the Bible's teaching about our sin. Even though teaching on depravity is not popular, it is necessary. Jesus did not come to this earth and die because we needed a friend, and a supporter for our dreams. He came because we were condemned by our sin and could not rescue ourselves. And sin has so fundamentally affected us that we are influenced by it in every area of our lives. We are a mess! And any attempts to deny the reality of sin, or to deny the categories of sin is an attempt to water down the gospel. If you deny the seriousness and pervasiveness of sin, then you deny the significance and power of the cross. Therefore, the gospel has to be defended from being watered down. But, the gospel also has to be defended from being added to. And here is where false teachers are so effective. They are able to use false guilt to hold influence over people. Some of the lies are stuff like:

If you do not use the KJV of the Bible, then you are probably not a believer.

If you do not dress up for church, then you are probably not a believer.

If you do not homeschool your children, or do not send your children to a Christian school, then you are compromising with the world. If you do not send your children to this one particular college, or use this one particular curriculum in Sunday School, or do not send your children to this one Christian camp, or do not speak in tongues, or do not experience dreams and visions, or do not experience healings, or if you do not do the rosary, or cross yourself when you walk by a cross, or if you do not give up things for lent or do not give up meat on Fridays during lent, then you are not a believer. It goes on and on and on and every one of these things is something that is added to the gospel so that what we do is now added to what Christ has already done. People who really believe that stuff, who preach that stuff, who promote that stuff do not understand the gospel and as a result their own lives are not marked by grace, peace, holiness and love.

Every church has to guard the purity of the gospel which is why every church needs elders who are humble, godly, discerning, trained and vigilant. And elders need members who will pray for them, encourage them, appreciate them and recognize that they have a very tough, often taken for granted type of responsibility. A church where the leaders love, care and protect the flock and where the flock appreciates, affirms and trusts the leaders is not only a beautiful thing, it is an awesome weapon in the hand of God.