

Text: Titus 1:10-16

Title: Ministry of the Qualified Elder

Truth: The spiritual landscape means that good pastors are needed.

Date/Location: Sunday June 13, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

The main point of the passage is that the elder must be qualified (previous verses) *because* there is a big job to do that requires those qualifications to be met. That job is described in verses 10-16 of Titus 1.

The apostle Paul quotes a “prophet” of the Cretans whose name we know to be Epimenides. He was the subject of legend and considered to be a prophetic figure to the Greeks. He may have been a shaman and is one of the founders of Orphism, a Greek religion. He wrote several texts. A translation of one passage of what he wrote is as follows:

THEY FASHIONED A TOMB FOR YOU, HOLY AND HIGH ONE,
CRETANS, ALWAYS LIARS, EVIL BEASTS, IDLE BELLIES.
BUT YOU ARE NOT DEAD: YOU LIVE AND ABIDE FOREVER,
FOR IN YOU WE LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE OUR BEING.¹

Notice that it contains lines that Paul quotes in Titus 1:12 and in Acts 17:28. Obviously Paul was conversant with relevant portions of pagan literature and used it when it served his purpose in evangelism. In fact, as its criticism came from one of their own, it could be more effective than if an outsider said it on his own authority.

As to the meaning of this pagan text, it is important to note the context. Epimenides is extolling the Greek god Zeus, saying that the residents of Crete believe Zeus to be dead and in need of a tomb (line 1). They were the keepers of his tomb. The prophet, however, does not believe Zeus to be dead (line 3) and so he calls Cretans liars and evil (line 2). He extols Zeus as the creator who is over everything (line 4).

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epimenides>

The apostle Paul used line 4 in Acts 17:28 to show that even the Greeks recognized that they came from a god, not from wooden or stone objects. Paul is going to preach to them the true God. Line 2 is quoted in Titus 1:12. Epimenides said that the Cretans are liars about Zeus. Paul agreed that they were liars and evil and idle, but they were just liars in general. It was not that they lied about Zeus being dead or had his tomb; it was that the *whole idea* of Zeus was a lie. Also, they were lazy and beastly in their evil. Perhaps they did things to their children that are unmentionable, or were dissolute, drunk, or immoral. They wanted a life of ease, to avoid as much work as possible. That is sinful nature, friends.

Before you focus too closely on the sinfulness of the Cretans, let us humble ourselves for a minute and consider some questions. Have we lied or deceived others, perhaps regularly, by either our words or strategic omission and silence? Then we too are liars. Have we done evil things? Then we are evil too. Have we regularly chosen to do other things that the work that we know we should be doing, or that assigned us either by our father, head of household, employer, or God? Then we are lazy too. Have you managed your food intake properly? The phrase “lazy gluttons” is something like “slow stomachs.” It may in fact refer to people who like their food a bit too much and it shows, along with a lazy lifestyle.

The text of verses 10-16 does two things: it shows the problems of the church, but commentaries miss the mark if they think that this section only covers the *problem*. In it are also found several aspects of the *solution* of the problem.

I. The Problems in Crete: Epidemic (or Epimenidic?)

A. Fake teachers, v. 10-11.

1. Insubordinate – contrast to qualified pastors in 1:6. These ones are rebellious, not subject to rule by anyone or anything. They are lawless. They do not regard authority.
2. Idle talkers. They offer foolish, meaningless blather. There is no substance to what they are saying. Much of this goes on today. Listen to people and they offer a lot of words, but in the mass of

words there is very little meaning. There may be emotion, but not cognition.

3. Deceivers. They mislead their audience. They push the propaganda of false teaching down the gullets of their unsuspecting audience members.
4. Circumcision party. We learn about these people in Acts 15:1. Most of that chapter covers the controversy about this and the solution to it. The overall idea of this faction was that obedience to the Law of Moses in some form is necessary for the Gentiles. This view is current today in the Hebrew Roots Movement. In the early church it was rampant.
5. They teach things they ought not. Note that—it is not supposed to be a religious free-for-all. “Ought not teaching” happens all the time today—gender issues, sexual immorality, racism, besides other false doctrines. There is a moral wrongness to that teaching and it should not be tolerated.
6. They do all this to “earn” (cheat people out of) money. They want to influence people with smooth words so they can help themselves to their victims’ money. Their motivation is not love or obedience toward God. It is greed. This was evidently the motivation of TB Joshua, a prosperity preacher and faith healer based in Nigeria who died this past week. He was 57 years old and a multi-millionaire.
7. The result of all this is that they subvert whole households. Some in the family believe the false teachings and others do not. The house is set against itself, and it cannot therefore be effective for God because it is divided.

B. Sinful citizens, v. 12-13a.

Titus and the pastors he appointed had to deal with more than just a small group of fake teachers. They also had to work with the citizens of the island.

1. The prophet quoted in the introduction called these people liars, evil, and lazy. J. D. Quinn paraphrased it this way: “Liars ever, men of Crete, / Nasty brutes that live to eat.” Paul simply said,

“This is true.” Some residents of Crete were pirates and made their living by evil. The island was not populated with dangerous animals, but the people took up that role and were “bestly.” They lived for physical pleasure.

2. The fact that it was a Cretan who said that Cretans are always liars has prompted some to consider the “liar’s paradox.” If all Cretans are always liars, can you believe one of them saying that they are all liars? Is that a lie or not? But that is too pedantic for practical Bible study. Even false teachers sometimes get it right! The original writer’s meaning, and Paul’s meaning, is a generalization. Example: “Americans are individualistic.” That is generally true, but not absolutely true of all Americans. Each of us is on a spectrum of individualism/groupism. Similarly, the residents of Crete had a general reputation of being liars.
3. Out of this situation comes teachers in an environment of people who like to listen to such teachers.

II. The Solution to the Problem in Crete: Good Pastoring

- A. We find the basic solution in the preceding context (1:5-9). That is, good men are called to be good pastors. Qualified men are needed to shepherd the church and evangelize the island. Each pastor becomes part of the solution by preaching and teaching Biblically accurate doctrine to fortify the church and convict those who contradict truth. He teaches healthy doctrine, as over against the idle, deceptive, circumcision doctrine that subverts whole households. He calls out things that ought not be taught, as well as the motivation of greed that drives the false teachers.
- B. A good pastor maintains a good reputation regarding lawfulness, speaking with meaning and truth, and money, contrary to the dishonest and greedy reputation that false teachers have (v. 11). He holds to truth and rejects cult doctrines like circumcision.
- C. A good pastor demonstrates good character, no matter the environment around him, and especially when it is full of lying, evil, and lazy people (v. 12).
- D. A good pastor rebukes both false teachers and the citizens influenced by them (v. 11). The teachers’ mouths must be stopped.

They are stopped not by stuffing them with a rag (that could be helpful!) but by teaching the truth of Scripture² so clearly and forcefully, so carefully and accurately and calmly, that Christians cannot but be convinced to follow it. Those who follow the false teachers will hopefully be won over.

The purpose or goal of such teaching is that the people may be sound in the faith. Nothing else really matters if you are not sound in the faith. If you are not in the real faith, you are disqualified from good works. You cannot even claim that you are a good person! A person who denies Jesus Christ is *not* a truly good person. Relatively good? Sure. Absolutely good? No way. Of course, no one is good to begin with, and God is making His people better so they indeed will be good people. But if you deny your creator and the One who redeems, that is bad.

- E. A good pastor warns specifically against false teachings. Two such teachings are listed in verse 14:
1. Jewish fables. You can easily imagine legends developing around famous people—and even minor characters—in the Old Testament. Perhaps they had stories about Abraham or Moses or Daniel which had become tall tales. We know of two additions to the book of Daniel (“chapters 13 and 14”) that are apocryphal.
 2. Commandments of men. Examples: tithing mint and anise and cumin, yet neglecting the weightier matters of the law (Matt. 23:23); teaching to hate your enemies (Matt. 5:43); do not touch, taste, or handle (Col. 2:21).
- F. A good pastor preaches the gospel to call people to be purified, and to explain what the Christian life looks like. The gospel requires a profession of faith in Jesus, and *that* results in good works. Such people are qualified to do good works, obedient to God and their

² The sad state of the American pulpit: There are many storytellers, entertainers, comedians, pop-psychologists, pontificators, leadership gurus, platform builders, one-liner creators, community organizers, and denominational politicians, BUT very few true Bible expositors. Unknown source.

human authorities, and admirable—instead of disqualified, disobedient, and detestable. The contrast is shown in verses 15-16.

1. The saved. They are called the “pure” in verse 15, just like in Acts 15:9. To them, all things are pure. This does not mean anything you can think of, including sinful things. It means that if a thing can be used for good, their mind thinks about that. It means that those things do not defile the person, for Mark 7:15 says that it is not things outside of a person that defile them, but those that come from within (speaking of food). I like to think of it as expressing that the Christian mind has been elevated out of the gutter. They do not think by default of sinful ways to use things.
2. The unsaved, on the other hand, are called the defiled. They are not purified by faith and their minds have not been lifted out of the gutter. Everything to them is a tool they can use for sin, even nominally good things. They take seemingly innocent things, even normal conversations, and turn them into sin. Internally their “light” is darkness (Matt. 6:23), and the impurity permeates their entire soul and conscience. Like the defilement principle of Haggai 2:13-14, whatever they touch becomes defiled.

The tricky thing about these ones that Paul is talking about is that they profess to know God. They are religious people. They are the fake teachers or their devotees. But the hollowness of their profession is demonstrated by their works, just as Jesus taught (Matt. 7:15-20). Their works are not good works. Instead, they are bad works and show that these unbelieving ones actually *deny* God (2 Tim. 2:12).

Their works demonstrate that internally, they are abominable, meaning morally repulsive. They are disobedient to God even though they claim to know God, and they are disqualified for every good work.

This means that the good they think they are doing has been defiled by their contact with it, and thus it is rejected by God. It is like those who offered God fasting and sacrifices but it was an empty religious exercise (Zechariah 7:4-7). It is just like what

Isaiah 64:6 says: we are unclean, and all our righteousness acts are thus like filthy rags. The myth of doing good to earn favor with God is that you yourself in an unsaved state are unqualified to even do good works, and when you do, they are dirty before God because they come from defiled hands. They count for nothing.

Conclusion

The pastor has a monumental job—yet what has been considered above is not all his work. There is even more. As far as stopping up false teaching, that is a thankless task. Rarely will the minister be appreciated by those he is trying to rescue from eternal damnation, or those he is trying to correct because they have some wrong thinking. Even rarer still would be a thanks from a false teacher who comes to his senses and abandons the empty profession of God in favor of the genuine faith.

Dear ones, let us be diligent to pay attention to what we are “giving heed to” in these days. Much needs to be rejected, and a whole lot needs to be ignored entirely so that we can focus on what matters.

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Other Thoughts for the Week

If you are reading Facebook more than you are reading the Bible and praying and fellowshiping with other Christians, then you have a serious problem.

You do the things that you want to do. For example, if instead of gathering with your church you do other things, then you are saying that those other things are more desirable to you, and presumably, more important.