

Titus 1:10-16

### *How To Ruin A Church*

Right now there are two books written by pastors on the NY Times bestseller list. They are right beside each other on the charts. They're both written by pastors of mega churches. They're both written by pastors who would say that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. They both deal with our purpose in life.

One is: *Your Best Life Now*, by Joel Osteen and the other is *The Purpose-Driven Life*, by Rick Warren.

Joel Osteen is the pastor Lakewood church in Houston Texas. Lakewood averages 32,000 people per week in its services. They just moved into their new facilities, the former Compaq Center Arena. Nielsen Media Research rated Joel Osteen's TV broadcast as the #1 inspirational program nationally, based on average television viewers per market.

Rick Warren is the pastor of Saddleback church in Lake Forest, CA which averages 23,000 people per week in it's services.

These are mega churches beyond "mega." And both pastors have had a tremendous impact on Americans.

There's some similarities between these two pastors, but there's some striking differences too.

Joel Osteen says, "Do you know you can cancel out God's best plan with your own negative words? If you go around talking defeat all the time it's going to stop God from bringing it to pass. No matter how much God loves you. No matter how many good things He has in store--if you speak those destructive words you can cancel out His best."

"Friends, you can change your world by changing your words...Remember, our words will become a self fulfilling prophecy...With our words we can predict what is coming. We can prophesy the future."

Lakewood church features a "prosperity gospel," which promises the faithful that if they ask, God will reward them financially.

Olsteen's wife Victoria, also preaches. She said, " God wants you to be financially successful [because] you are his representatives on earth."

Joel Olsteen smiles all the time. He never uses the word sin. He's always positive. He's a master motivational speaker that uses Christian jargon.

Michael Spenser writes: "In well over 25 hours of Olsteen's preaching that I listened to this year, Jesus was almost never mentioned, and when he was mentioned, it was in a brief prayer in the last minute. Sin, the Cross, the atonement? Not there."

Rick Warren's focus is very different. It's finding purpose in Christ. He writes: "Self-help books usually offer the same predictable steps to finding you life's purpose. "Of course, these recommendations are all good and often lead to great success."

"But being successful and fulfilling your life's purpose are not at all the same issue. You could reach all your personal goals, and still miss the purposes for which God created you. You need more than self-help advice. Jesus Christ once said this, (and then he quotes Matt 16:25 from the Message) 'Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self.'"

Two pastors who quote the Bible. Two churches that appear on the surface as successful, but in the end the message is as different as night and day.

The Purpose Driven Life is about living life according to God's purposes for His glory.

"Your Best Life Now," is about living life for all you can enjoy.

There's so many voices speaking to our world. Some are philosophical, some are moral, some our religious. Some sound really interesting and thousands buy into their message.

But what about us? How do we discern between this racket, this noise, this clamor of voices that constantly call for our attention?

And what happens to a church that can't discern between what's true and what isn't?

Last week we started looking at the New Testament book of Titus. If you'd like to turn there it's **PG 1058**

Titus is actually a letter that was written by an Apostle named Paul to a young man who assisted him in ministry named Titus.

Apostles were significant men in the beginning days of Christianity. The New Testament wasn't completed, churches were being started, so God used Apostles to write scripture and to provide direction while Christianity was in it's infancy.

One of the places where these new churches were located was the Island of Crete. Crete is a large island in the Mediterranean near the southern entrance to the Aegean Sea. It's rugged and mountainous and a resort area today.

In the first century it was a rather rough and tumble collection of individual cities. It was a stop over port for ships in the Mediterranean and a training camp for Roman soldiers.

William Barclay writes, "These Cretans had a barbaric, pagan background whose bent was self-service, violence, dishonesty and materialism. Even the idolatrous Greeks condemned the Cretans. They coined a word, kretizo which meant "to cretanize," or double deal and lie."

Crete was a hard place to live and an even harder place to live as a Christian.

But in Acts 2:11 we read about Jews from Crete who were in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost.

There were 7 major feasts, or religious celebrations held each year in Jerusalem. Exodus 23 required all Jewish males to be at three of those celebrations. Pentecost was one of those. So there were Jews there from nations all over the ancient world including Crete.

On that day The Apostle Peter got up and preached a powerful sermon on Jesus resurrection. He did it right there in Jerusalem less than 2 months after the crucifixion.

Peter gets up and says, "We all know Jesus rose from the dead." It was common knowledge. All of those men who were there for Pentecost would have been there 50 days before for Passover and the crucifixion.

Peter stood up before this crowd of devoutly religious Jews and said we all know Jesus rose. What's interesting is nobody said, "That's not true, we know where his body is."

They couldn't object because Peter was speaking fact. Thousands of Jews became believers in Jesus that day, and a bunch were from Crete.

They went back and started congregations. Now they needed instruction.

So Paul is commissioning Titus with the authority to get in there and bring some order to these fledgling churches.

We saw last week that Titus was to appoint elders. He was to appoint leaders in the churches to keep them from listening to confusing voices. To keep the church going in the right direction.

They didn't have pastors writing books and preaching on cable TV, but they had their church wreckers right from the beginning.

So let's pick up today in chapter one, verse 10 with a warning.

*I. We need to watch out for deceptive talkers.*

## **Read vs 10-11**

You'll notice that verse 10 starts with the word "for." That's because it's giving an explanation of what went before it so let's look back at verse 9.

## **Read 9**

Abbey Oberst writes: "Most Christians would concur that unity in the church is a spiritual, and practical, top priority. Jesus prayed and preached unity, and so did the apostles. To look at all the divisions in the church, from the time of Christ to the present, causes us to wonder: "Why can't we all just get along?" Let's not let our theology, or doctrine, divide us. Let's just love one another and be witnesses to the world." We must be careful, however, of mistaking "unity" for a comfortable homogeneity - in which we are all "getting along" at the sacrifice of truth."

"Throughout history God has caused corrective tremors in His church. To examine the Word and the story of its dissemination for the last 2,000 years, is to see God helping His people to GET IT RIGHT. Witness Paul's stinging rebukes to the Judaizers, who added cultural enhancements to the pure salvation message of grace through faith; or John's skillful refuting of the Gnostics, who intellectualized

spiritual truth to the point of heresy, and claimed exclusive rights to the truth.”

The fact is that while God values unity He values unity in truth. So here Paul commands Titus to appoint elders who would be students of the Bible who could keep the church from error.

Because, verse 10, there’s always going to be error. There’s always going to be people who turn the truth of the Bible around.

In Crete this involved a point of tension between established Judaism and early Christianity.

Christianity grew on the foundations of historic Judaism. Christians have Jewish prophets, a Holy Book that’s really the story of the Jewish people and God’s purposes, and a Jewish Messiah.

The first Christian believers weren’t Romans or Greeks. They were all Jewish.

At Pentecost the thousands of Jews who believed and spread out in the empire and started congregations.

It was only over time that non-Jewish people started coming into the church.

This seems so hard for us to understand because things have been so turned around over time.

But here’s what happened. Just like many changes have taken place in Christianity since it’s beginnings, plenty changed in Judaism too.

Most of what we know as normative Judaism today came in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah after the Babylonians and Assyrians had wreaked their destruction on Jerusalem.

For instance, never in the Jewish Scriptures does God command the building of Synagogues. There was a temple in Jerusalem where sacrifices were offered. There were special times of worship at the feasts, but there was no command to worship on every Sabbath. It was a day of rest and contemplation.

After the Jews were scattered from Israel, a system was devised for building

synagogues and with them came regular Sabbath worship. It wasn't wrong. It was added, not commanded by God.

By the time of the first century the Jewish leaders had added many things. I believe many of those things, unlike synagogue worship, weren't just neutral, some were wrong.

For instance, the Scriptures clearly say that Gentiles would also be counted as God's people.

*Ps 117:1 Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles! Laud Him, all you peoples!*

*Isa 11:10 "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious."*

*Mal 1:11 For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations," Says the LORD of hosts.*

The Jewish leaders ignored those verses. They thought that all Gentiles were under the curse of God and could never be part of God's family unless they became proselytes to Judaism.

Even Jesus' disciples struggled with accepting non-Jews as part of the family of God.

But once Jesus came, died as the Passover Lamb, and then rose from the dead, God's forgiveness was open to all.

What some Jewish people wanted to do was require all Gentiles to come through Judaism as they saw it before they could be in the church.

Those Jewish people caused problems in the early church. They said for a Gentile, coming to Jesus and trusting Him as Savior wasn't enough. That Gentile had to obey every command that God gave to the Jewish people plus all the additional stuff that had been added over the centuries.

The Bible says Jesus Christ came as a fulfillment of all that the OT prophets wrote. And when He died and rose again the way to heaven was opened for whosoever will come.

Jew, Gentile, different nationalities, different races. Different worship styles and preferences. The Bible says: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

So Paul, who was a Jewish believer in Jesus, instructed Titus, who was a Greek believer in Jesus, to appoint knowledgeable men in the church at Crete who would keep the church moving ahead in the truth.

*I. We Need To Watch Out For Deceptive Talkers*

*ii. Deception Can Be Partially True*

### **Read 12-14**

Like we said before, people from Crete didn't have the best reputation to start with. They were like the Corinthians in Greece, they were known for their ungodliness.

Here Paul quotes from a Cretan philosopher named Epiminedes. This isn't the first time Paul, who was a well educated man, quoted from Epiminedes.

In Acts 17 we get the account of Paul on Mars Hill in Athens. He gets into a debate with Athenian philosophers and he quotes Greek poets. He says, "God is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being..." and that's also from Epiminedes.

We mentioned last week that there's something in philosophy called the Epimindes Paradox.

The question is if Epimindes is a Cretan and he says all Creatians are liars, was he telling the truth or lying?

There are some atheist and Islamic web sites that even try to make the argument that Paul couldn't have been inspired by God when he wrote because he didn't see the contradiction.

Then he says, "This testimony is true."

Is it true? Well remember, Epiminedes didn't say all Creatians lie all the time, he just said they're all liars.

What I want us to see is there's truth in that statement. Just like there will be truth in most of what we hear, even if the end result is a false message.

I believe Joel Olsteen is bringing a false message. He may be sincere, and he may believe everything he's saying, but it's still a false message.

He's telling people that life is all about them instead of all about God. But that doesn't mean that he doesn't pepper his writings and his speaking with truth.

This is why Paul tells Titus to make sure that elders in the church are guys that know the Bible well.

God makes absolutist claims when it comes to both the old and new testaments. He says His word is truth.  
His word is sufficient. His word is complete.

These guys causing problems in Crete were teaching what he calls, *"Jewish fables and commandments of men."*

The problem wasn't just people with different interpretations of Scripture. That's always going to happen. These were people who said the Bible isn't sufficient. The Bible isn't complete. And they added their ideas and tried to put them on everyone else.

Today, I believe the biggest battle in the church isn't over the inerrancy of Scripture. Today the battlefield is the sufficiency of scripture.

The question is, is the Bible enough when it comes to the issues of life? On Crete there were deceivers who wanted to add fables and man made ideas to God's word.

They said some things that were true and some things that were false but they added to the Bible. The problem is a little bit of arsenic poisons the whole pie.

Today it seems like there's no end to the teachers and preachers who want to psychologize the Bible. Suddenly the Scriptures, which contain all things that pertain to life and godliness, aren't quite enough.

Now we've got positive thinking, self-help, recovery groups, and every psychological fad under the sun invading the church.

John MacArthur, in his book *"The Sufficiency of Scripture,"* writes this about psychology, which literally means 'The study of the soul,' : *"Outside the Word of*



God and His Spirit there are no solutions to any of the problems of the human soul. Only God knows the soul and only God can change it. Yet the widespread ideas of modern psychology are theories originally developed by atheists on the assumption that there is no God and the individual has the power to change himself into a better person through certain techniques.”

Think about it, we go to a doctor because he or she has studied medicine. While modern medicine is constantly improving the general consensus for treating most things is pretty solid.

If you have appendicitis and your appendix needs to come out you don’t have to interview doctors to find the one you like because there’s thirty different philosophies of appendix surgery.

But start interviewing psychologists and psychiatrists about their methods and you’ll find that there’s scores of competing and often contradictory methodologies because Psychology isn’t a science.

If we want to study the soul then it only makes sense to go to the Creator of the soul to understand what makes us tick.

And yet church after church is buying into ideas that are based on psychological models instead of biblical models.

Some issues clearly are medical and need treatment. But most behavioral issues aren’t medical.

The way to deal with those behavioral issues is to find out what God says about them and then step by step put God’s wisdom into practice.

And the issue isn’t that a lot of man made ideas don’t contain some truth. That’s what makes them appealing. But when that truth is mixed with error and misapplied, our individual lives fall apart and our churches are destroyed.

These guys that Titus was to watch out for had some things to say that were true.

They said God commanded circumcision. And He did. It was a sign of His covenant with Israel.

They said God gave the Law of Moses with it’s 623 specific commandments. And He did. Again, it was given to Israel not to the Gentiles.

But then they said this: If God gave these commands then the only people who could come to God were the people who kept these commands.

They totally ignored the fact that the purpose of the commands was to show the absolute holy standards of God. That no one, no matter how hard they tried could keep them perfectly.

That God didn't give them to provide forgiveness but to show the need of forgiveness. To show Israel, and ultimately the world, that no one could live up to the totality of the laws demands.

God's law was designed to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that we all need a Savior.

The whole sacrificial system was designed to show that the wages of sin is death, and that an innocent substitute could die for the guilty.

It was all designed to point to the final sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

There's usually sheds of truth in every religion. In the end the question is, is it consistently true. The measure of consistency is the Bible.

- I. *We Need To Watch Out For Deceptive Talkers*
- II. *Deception Can Be Partially True*
- III. *When God Is In Control We'll Have Discernment*

## **Read vs 15-16**

When you go to a doctor and something's wrong inside, doctors have all sorts of diagnostic tools to try and figure out what is wrong. They have X-rays and CT scans, and MRI's and other even more unpleasant things to figure out what's going wrong in you.

Paul is saying here, Let me give you a diagnostic. You want to see what's going on in the heart of a person? Look at their life. Look at their actions. Look at what they love. Look at how they spend their time. Look at what they care about. Look at their priorities. Look at their behavior. Look at their actions, because our deeds reveal our hearts.

A person whose letting God's truth control their lives will have discernment when it comes to God's truth.

Paul's words are infinitely practical to these Cretan Christians, but they are infinitely practical for us too.

They lived in an immoral, spiritually confused culture and so do we. And our great temptation is to try to keep one foot in the world and one foot in God's kingdom; to try and live a little bit like the culture around us, and a little bit like Christians.

God is saying to us this morning, "That's not what I want for you. I want you to have faith in my Son. And I want you to live in my freeing truth. And the only way you'll do that is by knowing, and living out the truth of the Bible."

How do you ruin a church? By undermining people's confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture. Once that happens then the door is open for every new philosophy, creed and ism that comes along.

the Bible says, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*