

## Unmasked

The Shepherd's Mantle- Part 7

*Titus 1:12-16*

In his commentary on the Book of Titus, Warren Wiersbe writes, "It did not take long for false teachers to arise in the early church. Wherever God sows the truth, Satan quickly shows up to sow lies. False doctrine is like [some cancer]; it enters secretly, it grows quickly, and it permeates completely unless it is attacked before it has a chance to spread."<sup>i</sup>

There was a problem on the island of Crete. The problem has been in existence now for nearly 2,000 years and it has reached our little town of Cary.

False teaching . . . false religion . . . false teachers . . . deceived flocks . . . twisted scripture . . . additions to scripture . . . distortions of scripture and all done by seemingly religious men whose motives are actually self-serving.

In fact, if you look at *verse 14*, you'll notice immediately that the content of their teaching was not the Apostle's teaching – but the inclusion of myths or fables along with extra commandments made up by men.

It was all man-made, make believe stuff that sounded biblical but wasn't actually the Bible. And all the religious mythologies and all the extra commandments were literally ripping the churches apart on the island of Crete – being taught by men who wanted to seduce the flock for their own gain rather than shepherd the flock for their own good.

Now, the Apostle Paul knows that the solution is for the church to be well led and well fed, so he leaves Titus on the island to appoint elders in every church who would literally stand up to these false teachers and effectively unmask them.

These teachers were supposedly revealing deeper truths – they were exposing new wisdom for living – they were uncovering new secrets about God and the way to heaven.

And Paul says, I want you as elders, for the sake of the gospel and the protection of the Flock to expose these false teachers for who they are – I want you to effectively unmask them.

Unmask their motives; unmask their teaching; and even go so far as to unmask their future unless they repent.

### Unmask Their Motives – Money and Fame

Go back to *verse 10* and let's get a running start. ***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.***

Let's just jump right in and call it like it is. It's all about it's all about money and fame.

In fact, the word translated *gain* can be understood to be either money or fame or both – in this case it is more than likely both.

When Paul was writing this letter to Titus, the ancient world spoke of the three most evil C's: the Cilicians, the Cappadocians and the Cretans.<sup>ii</sup>

By the time of Titus's ministry on the island, Polybius, a Greek historian had already written that the Cretans, lived in a perpetual state of private quarrel and public feud and civil strife – they are tricky and deceptive characters. He writes, money is so highly valued among them, that its possession [provides instant credibility]; greed is so native to the soil in Crete, that they are the only people in the world among whom no stigma is attached to any sort of gain whatever.<sup>iii</sup>

In other words, it didn't matter how you got what you had, so long as you had it – sordid gain. In our

modern vernacular we might call it, “drug money” . . . in other words, you’re rich, but you got it the wrong way. And the Cretans wouldn’t care – you got the money – that’s all that matters on this island . . . money talked and fame was everything.

This was the culture of Crete.

Now what Paul does next is surprising. He appeals to common knowledge in his ancient world by quoting someone they revered as a prophet and highly respected – but a man who centuries earlier had also pulled the mask off the Cretans.

Notice *verse 12*. ***One of themselves, a prophet of their own says, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true.***

What makes this so intriguing is that the guy pulling off the masks of the Cretans is a Cretan himself, who evidently had a moment of honest reflection.

Paul is bolstering his argument which is going to be hard to swallow on the Island of Crete. He says, “Listen, a Cretan even admits that Cretans are lazy liars; and he’s not just any Cretan – he’s one of your own revered prophets.”

Paul is quoting Epimenides, a native born man from the island of Crete. Plato dated him around 500 years before the birth of Christ.<sup>iv</sup>

And notice the first thing their own beloved prophet had to say about them as a general rule – ***Cretans are always liars.***

And Paul adds, ***this testimony is true!***

In other words, this is the rule of thumb. The culture of Crete is literally given over to lying.

Aren’t you glad you don’t live on the Island of Crete? Wow, imagine that kind of culture?

Well you don’t have to imagine very hard.

USA ran the results of a survey where 7,000 resumes were investigated. The results showed:

- 48% exaggerated their former compensation
- 52% turned partial college or graduate work into earned degrees
- 60% exaggerated on the number of people under their former supervision
- 64% exaggerated on their former accomplishments and
- 71% lied about the number of years they spent at their former job

The scary thing was this survey was taken 11 years ago.<sup>v</sup>

Another survey taken a few years ago found people admitting to:

- Calling in sick at work when they weren’t;
- Taking office supplies from their company for personal use;
- Shifting blame to a co-worker for something they did;
- Receiving too much change from a cashier without telling them;
- Downloading music without paying for it;
- Cheating on their income tax;
- Switching price tags to get a lower price;
- Lying to friends and family over multiple things.

The truth is we *also* live in a culture of dishonesty.

But we’re Christian’s right? This text isn’t given to us so that we can sit around and say, “Look at those terrible Cretans.” We out to be asking – is this the way I am as a Christian?

Have I given in to the culture of lying which surrounds my island too?

If you’re raising children, you’ve discovered that the problem didn’t originate on the island of Crete, it originates within the fallen human nature.

And so you never have to teach your children how to lie. By age 5 they’re pretty good at.

We’re like that little guy who got his Bible memory verse mixed up and said a mouthful when he quoted, “Lying is an abomination unto the Lord, but a very present help in time of trouble.”<sup>vi</sup>

Frankly, lying can pay off in the short run . . . did you notice that 50% of those resume’s indicated that people were banking on it.

But it can easily tangle you up and catch up to you over time. Robert Louis Stevenson famously wrote, “Oh what a tangled web we weave when we first begin to deceive.”

My father often said to us four boys as we were growing up, “Boys, telling the truth is actually a lot easier on you than lying because when you tell the truth, you never have to remember what you said.”

There is an implicit warning in this text – don’t buy into the culture of your island.

Paul quotes further here in *verse 12* that Cretans were also ***evil beasts***. This word refers to someone who was untamable and uncontrollable. They literally had no respect for authority and could not be reined in.

In fact, during the days of Titus, people were already joking that there were no wild animals on the island of Crete because the people were so wild.<sup>vii</sup>

They are also referred to in *verse 12 as lazy gluttons*.

This phrase can be translated *idle stomachs* referring to those who were given over to luxurious feasting and refused to work [an honest job.]<sup>viii</sup>

In other words, they wanted to do nothing more than deceive people into supporting their work while they grew figuratively and literally fat by means of their opulent lifestyle.

They were living off their deceptive ways. And they were always looking to pull off the next scam.

Paul responds to this testimony by an ancient Cretan by adding his own emphatic – *verse 13, This testimony is true*.

In other words, there's no need to deny it. The congregations on this island and especially the elder/shepherds need to face the facts – this is true!<sup>ix</sup>

And the game of religion had begun . . . and these false teachers who were nothing more than greedy hucksters who sold their message for the sake of sordid gain. Religion was their way to scam people – and it continues to be a profitable scam to this very day!

Paul effectively says to Titus, “Listen, this is what you and the men you appoint as elders are up against. The role of a shepherd is to warn the flock and protect the flock and while you're at it, unmask the motives of false teachers – because behind that mask of pious and religious language is a man who really only cares about money and fame.

Notice what Paul orders the elders to do at the middle of verse 13. Reprove them severely so they will be sound in the faith.

The Greek root word for “sound” – sound in the faith – gives us our English word, “hygiene”.<sup>x</sup>

These men needed to be made sound – they were spiritually diseased.

And so the order is to reprove them – stand up to them – expose their error – and would you notice Paul writes, *reprove them severely*.

That adverb can be rendered, “abruptly or sharply”.<sup>xi</sup>

It implies the swift and skillful cutting of the surgeon's knife to cut away that which isn't healthy, so there can be healing.

I am this morning a sitting illustration of that – as are many of you, I'm sure.

When I went to the doctor several weeks ago he announced that I'd broken my knee – again – and this time there would have to be surgery.

I couldn't excuse myself from the severity of his diagnosis.

I couldn't ask him to settle for ice on my knee to take away the swelling: I couldn't ask for one of those sponge Bob band aids I saw in the back or maybe even some really strong medication to take away the pain.

I could use all three, but they wouldn't bring restoration.

No . . . I had to be dealt with severely . . . invasively . . . in order for me to have health.

Paul says, “Reprove them severely . . .” And by the way, this command is in the present tense, implying that this invasive procedure and its effects are gonna be felt for a while.<sup>xii</sup>

This isn't going to be fixed overnight.

Titus, you and the other elders need to be in this for the long haul. This isn't a weekend seminar – this isn't a 3 year seminary degree – this is an ongoing call of those who wear the mantle of shepherd.

Unmask their motives.

### **Unmask their Teaching – Myths and Fable**

Secondly, Paul tells Titus and the other elders, you need to not only unmask their motives of money and fame, you also need to unmask their teaching – it's all about myths and fables.

Notice *verse 14* – Paul continues to reference these false teachers who are *paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth*.

In other words, they *are* teaching – they've got outlines, study notes, handbooks and best-selling hardbacks. They're holding seminars and weekend conferences. And they are good enough at speaking and teaching that, from what Paul implies, many people are following buying in with everything they've got.

So, they are indeed teaching; however, if you take the time to inspect it – things that are manmade. They might quote the Bible but they don't really care about the Bible.

Many men in pulpits today will use the Bible as a resource but not as the source of their teaching;

which opens up the flock to all sorts of error and spiritual danger.

For instance, In Titus' day, the Book of Jubilees was making the rounds, supposedly having extra information on the biographies of the patriarchs which led to all sorts of superstitions and speculations.

In addition to this, by the end of the first century, many rabbis had given mystical or numerical meaning to letters which they applied to the Old Testament scriptures, coming up with all sorts of bizarre interpretations.

Then in the early centuries other writings were composed claiming to be from God – such as Bel and the Dragon, The History of Susanna, The writings of Tobit and Judith – writings of pure fiction filled with historical errors and questionable morality.<sup>xiii</sup>

The Gospel of Thomas, written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century came along claiming to contain 120 secret words of the living Jesus – a book that doesn't resemble the Gospel but includes sheer myth.<sup>xiv</sup>

The Apocrypha, the Talmud and the Cabbala are also early writings outside of inspired scripture that have promoted some kind of moral lesson at best, but redefined gospel truth at worst.

Then you get a guy like Dan Brown to write, The Da Vinci Code and put some of these legends together and gnostic gospels together and a bucket load of historical speculations and you have an intriguing book of fiction which unfortunately millions of people believed as fact. What do you know – Jesus married Mary Magdalene, turned his ministry over to her and, according to Gnostic gospels, raised a family of children in the south of France.

And people aren't done treating the Bible like some sort of secret code book either.

There are currently 16 million pages on the web devoted to the Bible Code with the belief that secret messages are embedded in the text and all you have to do is lay out the letters and then skip every third one or every 7<sup>th</sup> one and the words that are created are messages from God.

The Bible code predicted Obama would be assassinated in 2009, Hillary Clinton would somehow become the leader of the free world who would in turn subsidize the antichrist and launch global persecution. And people said, "I knew it!"

But wait . . . um, that was 2009. So do the Bible Code people apologize for getting their message from God wrong and walk away from such nonsense? Hardly. They simply go after new coded messages.

And the credibility of Christianity is turned on its ear.

By the way, the Bible code revealed that the South actually won the Civil War. I know some people who would be thrilled with that revelation.

The problem is, the Bible code can be used to prove the existence of Darth Vader, that Germany won World War II and that the moon is made out of Swiss cheese.

It's nothing more than a distraction and there is absolutely no spiritual nourishment in any of these secret messages or codes or myths.

Evidently, these false teachers were preying on the fears of people by giving them secret messages from the mythical past of their forefathers with all sorts of new applications and principles from their lives.

Paul adds to that they not only paid attention to Jewish myths, but to the commandments of men who turn away from the truth – that is, the truth about the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But that's not all. By the time Titus was appointing elders in the churches on the island of Crete, these Jewish false teachers were promoting their centuries old view that God had actually given the nation Israel two sets of laws at Mount Sinai. One was the written law – the Torah – the first five Books of the Old Testament; and the oral law – which was made up of ever-growing writings, opinions, rulings, interpretations, discussion and traditions.<sup>xv</sup>

So you end up with the Bible (the Old Testament) plus something else with equal authority.

Think of how many religions and cults around the world have the Bible plus something else – think of how many religions and cults there continue to get updates from God!

The uniqueness of Christianity is that God has spoken. We're not waiting for Him to say, "Uh . . . there's one more thing you need to know in order to get to heaven."

No, true Christianity hasn't added anything to the Old Testament for thousands of years and nothing has been added or taken away from the New Testament for 2,000 years.

But these teachers were coming along and saying, “We’ve got something new from God . . . we’ve got a coded message from heaven . . . wait’ll you hear this one.”

But instead of relieving the spiritual burden of their followers, they only added to it.

For instance, the Jews had the simple commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy . . . don’t make it a day of work or labor.

For centuries they added interpretation upon interpretation, law upon law, nuance upon nuance so that by the time of Titus, they had decided that eating your soup was not a violation of the Sabbath law if – and I mean if – it didn’t weigh more than one fig. I don’t know how much a fig weighs, but

I’m sure I’ve put pieces of chocolate cake into my mouth that weighed more. And I worked at it.

They debated whether or not you could carry your baby on the Sabbath.

They assumed that taking a journey on the Sabbath would be work so they decided that you couldn’t walk more than 200 feet past your front door. But that wasn’t very accommodating, so some believed that God would be okay if they tied a rope to their front door that was 200 feet long and then you could walk 200 feet further.

So many regulations . . . so many rules.

Ladies and Gentlemen, all of these myths and commandments were distorting the clarity and simplicity of the gospel.

They were damaging the purity of the gospel of faith in Christ’s work alone.

Damaged doctrine damages people.<sup>xvi</sup>

Teaching them that the only way to find acceptance with God is to keep a list means you have to have something about you that’s good and worthy; so make sure you keep all your p’s and q’s and wash behind your ears . . .

All that leads people – and the church – into one of two errors: personal despair – because you can’t keep the lists of man; besides what if the list is actually longer – that leads on one hand to personal despair and on the other hand to personal pride.<sup>xvii</sup>

Hey, look at my list – I’ve checked off every box 6 weeks in a row – I know God must love me now.”

Dear flock, we are accepted in the beloved not because we’ve kept a list but because we’ve come to Christ.

There is value in convictions and sensitivities and standards and cautions and disciplines – Romans 14 makes that very clear.

We are not sensitive enough or disciplined enough or careful enough . . . but if we think that by exercising one more discipline or one more caution or one more standard and that by doing it more consistently we will be brought into the favor and love of God, we will be led into despair – or into pride.

We live under the flow of Christ’s cleansing blood on our behalf – for we continually He continuously cleanses us for all sin. (I John 1:7) and because of Christ’s work, we are clothed in His righteousness already and ***nothing will ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39).***

Titus, you and the other elders need to make sure you are on the alert for false teaching. Don’t have any patience with the myths and fads and false teaching or your generation or the legalistic commandments that kidnap a believer from the truth that he is safely within the love and favor of God, through Christ alone.

Paul adds this principle in ***verse 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.***

The word for pure here means clean. It’s the Greek word *katharos* (καθαρος) from which we get our word *catharsis*.

Taken in the context of this paragraph, Paul is saying that if you’ve been made by sound doctrine – then nothing can ever place you outside the realm of that clean estate. That doesn’t mean you can’t sin – you can and you must daily ask forgiveness so that your fellowship is open before the Lord.

But you don’t confess to become a Christian all over again – you are not confessing for the sake of sonship, but fellowship.

Paul is also implying in this text that to those who are clean, they look at everything with the purest of intentions. They desire to be clean. In other words, they’re not looking for the dirt and smut in life.

However, by contrast, those who are not cleansed by Christ – note that key contrasting words – ***you who are defiled and unbelieving.*** In other words, they were still in their sins – their state of unbelief. And in that state, there is nothing they can do to make themselves pure or clean.

Only Christ can cleanse someone and make them whole.

And again, the implication here is that the defiled person only sees the dirty side of life. They're lives are dirty innuendo.

One commentator wrote it this way, "We change whatever we touch into our own nature [he tries to clean relationships and vocabulary]; the man with a dirty mind soils every thought; his imagination turns to lust every picture which it forms . . . he can take the loveliest things and cover them with smut."<sup>xviii</sup>

It's a matter of their nature – one redeemed and cleansed and the other unredeemed and defiled.

Like the proverbial little girl who brought into her farmhouse her pet pig and her pet lamb – she put them both into the bathtub and scrubbed them both until they shone – she brushed them and dried them and put a pink ribbon around both their necks and she went outside to play with them and of course, they ran outside and went in two different directions; the lamb ran toward the green lawn and the pig ran back into the mud.

Here's the difference; the defiled and unbelieving long to sin, while the forgiven believer longs to live a clean life out of gratitude for the amazing grace of God.

- Unmask the motives of these false teachers – it's all about money and fame;
- Unmask the teaching of these false teachers – it's all about myths and fables;

### **Unmask their Future – Misery and Fruitlessness**

Finally: Unmask the future of these false teachers – it's all about misery and fruitlessness.

***Notice verse 16. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.***

They profess to know God! The word Paul uses here for knowledge of God isn't *ginosko* (γινωσκω) a word for experiential, relational knowledge, but *oida* (oida) for intellectual knowledge gained by information.<sup>xix</sup>

In other words, these false teachers look the part. They know some of the vocabulary. They know some things about God – but they don't *know* God. I couldn't help but laugh along with you as Dave Burggraaf preached last Sunday and used the illustration about bowling – he had his own bowling ball and bowling shoes and gloves, but he admitted he wasn't really any good at it.

He looked the part, but wasn't really a player.

I got this a couple of months ago in my email, this guy wrote, "During my physical yesterday, my doctor asked me about my daily activity level." So I told him, "Well, yesterday I spent all morning outside wading along the edge of a lake – at one point I had to jump away from an aggressive rattlesnake; I walked up and down some rocky hills, had to run from some wild dogs and stood in a patch of poison ivy." The doctor said, "You must really love the outdoors." "Not exactly," I replied, "I'm just a lousy golfer."

I look the part . . . I've got the equipment . . . I know the language, but that's about it.

Ladies and Gentlemen, there are only about 8 inches between heaven and hell for you; knowing about God up here, or believing in God down here.

For many people, I fear, there is knowledge of God in their mind, but no true personal trust in God in their heart.

They know the language . . . but they've never met the Savior.

I've been able to finally finish the biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer – a pastor from Germany who was executed near the end of World War II by the direct order of Adolph Hitler.

Now that I've read that biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I can honestly say that I know quite a bit about him. The biography was 624 pages long. I can even quote a line or two by him . . . but while I can say now that I know about him, I can't say I know him. In, fact, I've never met him.

Maybe you've read this Book written by God about God. Maybe you can even quote a line or two out of it.

Maybe you've never even denied the truth about what you know about God – from the time you were a little child.

Do you know some facts *about* Him – or have you given your heart *to* Him.

If you don't know for sure where you stand in this regard, I invite you here after the service – I'll be sitting up here in between services – I've got nothing else to do . . . and there is nothing else I'd rather do than talk to you.

Now, before we wrap up chapter 1, the Apostle Paul has inserted two purpose statements into this paragraph.

Titus – you need to appoint elders – you need to assign shepherds to every flock – why?

**1. First of all, to save the church family from harm.**

Notice *verse 11* again – “*they [the false teachers] have gotta be silenced – why? – because they are upsetting whole families – in other words, they are tearing apart the family and the larger church family by virtue of their false teaching.*”

You have to wear the mantle of a shepherd and protect the flock from harm.

Secondly, and this is a bit surprising – not only must the elder save the church family from harm;

**2. He needs to save the false teacher from hell.**

*Notice again, verse 13 – For this reason, reprove them (the false teachers) severely, so that – here’s the purpose – so that they may be sound in the faith.*

Titus, the gospel you deliver is not only for the purpose of warning the Flock, but winning false teachers and those who follow them to saving faith in Christ.

What a surprise! You would expect Paul to get to the end of this and say, “They’re hopeless!”

Look at the description in *verse 16 – they are detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.*

That word for worthless is *adokimos* (ἀδοκιμος). If a builder was building a stone building and found a stone that had a flaw in it, he’d mark it with a capital A for *adokimos* – it was useless and unfit for the building.<sup>xx</sup>

They’re Cretans . . . wild, lazy, gluttonous, constantly lying, defiled, detestable, unfruitful and unable to accomplish even one good thing.

You’d think Paul would get to the end of this description and tell “Titus, they’re bad men and everybody knows it so leave them alone – they are beyond redemption.”<sup>xxi</sup>

Instead, Paul says, “They’re bad men and everybody knows so go and give them the gospel – they are not beyond redemption.”

False teachers can be saved too!<sup>xxii</sup>

They are after our hearts just as much as we are after theirs; but they can’t have ours – because we’ve already given our hearts away; and we urge them to give their hearts away to Jesus Christ, as well.

Our evangelism training program sends out teams weekly – in the past few weeks they have been able to share the gospel with quite a number of people.

I was told this past week that one team had a young lady come along who was fluent in Spanish. She wasn’t a regular member of the team but just felt a desire to come that particular night and go out with one of our teams. The team visited an apartment complex where a man was very interested in the gospel. He invited the team into his apartment where he just so happened to have two guests – neither of whom knew any English. This young lady was able to present the gospel to them in Spanish and they both received Christ that night as their personal Savior. In the last few weeks, 19 adults have received Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior through the efforts of these teams and some of them are here this morning.

There are no mysteries . . . no long lists to promise or deeper codes to learn – just the simple gospel of Jesus Christ.

Titus, go find men who believe, that:

Live is short

Death is sure

Sin is the culprit

Christ is the cure.<sup>xxiii</sup>

It’s that simple.

There’s no ancient myth to figure out . . .

Life is short . . . death is sure . . . sin is the culprit but Christ is the cure.

Go find men, who will not add to that; who won’t compromise that; who will defend that and who will unmask those who twist that.

Go find men, who will guard and protect and teach and love the flock – to the point of giving their lives to the pressures and penalties, to both the delights and duties of the office of elder.

Find men who will live for the advancement of the gospel and the equipping of the saints and the building up of the church until Jesus Christ says – and at any moment He can say, “This time is over . . . it’s up . . . the church is now complete.” And he rides upon the wind with those who’ve gone before us and calls from the clouds to those of us who remain – and He takes His bride away to the Father’s house.

Titus, find men who will live for *that* day . . . and when you find them – and you will – place upon their shoulders and hearts, the mantle of a genuine, gospel loving, Christ exalting shepherd.

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