

## DEALING WITH THE ROADBLOCKS

### Titus 1:10-2:1

Let's pretend that you live about a mile outside of town and one day someone sets up a roadblock between you and town. Now because of this roadblock you are forced to go the opposite direction of town a few miles and then take some dirt roads for several more miles to make a big loop and come in on the south side of town. So what used to take you just a couple minutes to get to work, now takes you about half an hour. And this roadblock is up for days, then weeks, then months. And you put up with it. You get up earlier, you spend way more money on fuel, your car is taking a beating from the dirt roads, maybe you even get stuck a couple times in the winter and you can't make it to work. Life would be so good and so easy for you if they just took that roadblock down again. But imagine that one day, months later, you find out that it just a couple of jokers that put it up and it wasn't real? All that time there was nothing wrong with the road, no road construction, and whoever put it up made you work a lot harder and spend more time and money every single day for nothing.

In the book of Titus, we're talking about a church that is going places for the Lord and living out their faith but one of the problems that was going on in the churches was that **false teachers were putting up fake spiritual roadblocks**. Paul wants them doing genuine and truly spiritual good works with proper motives but false teachers had them doing ritualistic works and good works from bad motives. They were taking the good news of the gospel and adding works to it, making life a lot harder and confusing. This is a book that has a heavy emphasis on good works – but what makes a work good? **How can one good work be accepted by God and another “good work” not be accepted by God?** That's what we're going to talk about today in verses 1:10-2:1.

Last week we talked about appointing elders and elders are considered the spiritual shepherds of the flock. They lead, feed and protect it like any shepherd would their sheep. They **lead** by example, they see the flock is **feeding** on good and solid nutritional food, and lastly, they **protect** it from predators like wolves who would destroy and mislead or poison the flock with bad food. Elders protect the church by protecting the truth and chasing off the wolves. Without faithful shepherds, the church as a whole will suffer greatly. So here we see the elder's great responsibility to protect the flock.

#### I. THE ELDERS ARE TO SILENCE THE FALSE TEACHERS. (VV. 10-11)

In contrast to the biblically qualified elders Paul described in the last passage, Paul now describes the false and unqualified “want-to-be” leaders here. We'll look at several descriptions of them:

##### **Description #1 – There are many of them.**

In the words of the Declaration of Independence, I want to say, “I hold this truth to be self-evident!” There are **MANY OF THEM!** It hardly gets more relevant than that. There are many false teachers out there teaching many false gospels and trying to lead the flock astray. It was true in Paul's day and it is true in ours. If you know the true gospel message of grace and have a working knowledge of the Bible, you know this is true. If you go to most churches or turn on your tv or radio to religious broadcasts, chances are many of them are not teaching God's Word. There are always a faithful remnant, but many just aren't. They're teaching a false gospel of works if they're teaching any sort of specific gospel at all. That was the case in Crete.

**Description #2 – They teach a false gospel of works.**

Paul specifically points out the group referred to as the “circumcision”. Having just gone through the book of Galatians we are very familiar with this troublesome group of legalistic Jews that we sometimes call Judaizers. These are men who would’ve called themselves Christians, they believed it was necessary for Christ to die and be buried and raise again – BUT – then they would say it wasn’t necessarily enough. It’s only part of gospel. They would say that if you really want to be saved and pure and godly then you’ve got to do these rituals or keep these feasts and perform these religious ceremonies like circumcision. Titus was written quite a while after Galatians and after the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 which denounced their teachings as heretical, but here they are still. Paul is still dealing with them. Why is that? Because man’s pride loves to work for salvation. Instead of trusting Christ’s work, man wants to bring something before God and say, “Look what I did!”

**Description #3 – They are insubordinate men.**

They are rebellious. They reject authority. They are insubordinate to the church leaders like Titus and the apostles. They won’t listen because they want to be the source of truth. They want the attention. These are guys who don’t want to be a part of a board because then they would have someone to answer to and be held accountable. These are self-willed men who aren’t be qualified for leadership. They won’t even submit to the word of God revealed through the apostles. At our church, we want to know the word of God and we want to submit to it. That’s why we go through the Bible the way we do, a little at a time, in context.

**Description #4 – They are empty talkers.**

These guys talk and talk and talk but don’t say anything spiritually productive. They’re teaching things at times that God has no regard for: they don’t matter to God or they’re teaching the exact opposite of what God desires and so it’s vanity, empty. One man said, “You can always spot those who don’t teach truth by the way they say absolutely nothing beautifully.”<sup>1</sup> They don’t teach doctrine and aren’t carefully going through the Word of God. Instead of going to the text and finding out what God has said, they preach what they want to talk about and try to make God’s Word say what they want it to, which is probably whatever is going to sell and make them money.

**Description #5 – They teach what they shouldn’t for sordid gain.**

They don’t really care about these people or have eternity in mind. They like to prey on weak and hurting people who are desperately seeking anything to hold on to for hope. And when a prosperity preacher comes along and promises them in the name of God what God hasn’t promised – like your best life now – or if you give towards their ministry, they say God will bless you ten or 100 times in return to get you out of debt – they fall for it. There’s a lot of men and women out there using the title of apostle or prophet just to make money – they say “if you send your gift they will pray for you with the powerful prayer of an apostle! The more you give, the more God will bless you!” If you give to them “God will open doors of success and create business opportunities for you! God will lead you to unbelievable prosperity and unbreakable success in Jesus name!” Beware of men like that whose emphasis is on financial prosperity and exploit God’s promises for their own profit.

**Description #6 – They are deceivers.**

These guys are doing it on purpose. They know exactly what they’re doing. They’re Satanically inspired and leading people astray.

**Description #7 – They’re upsetting whole families.**

Whole families were being upset by these guys, which may tell us how these Judaizers often operated. They went around from house to house and focused on a few people at a time. It’s easier to deceive that way and prey on people that way. You can imagine how upsetting it was when a family who had believed in Christ and were genuinely saved and had so much joy, later had that joy shipwrecked by false teachers who said believing wasn’t enough, thus destroying their assurance and enslaving them to a works-based system again.

Paul says quite graphically **you need to silence these guys**. Literally, the word means to put a muzzle on them and shut their mouths because they’re ruining lives and upsetting families and distorting the gospel message, distracting people from Christ. So if there’s a guy like this in our church that sneaks in and starts teaching what he ought not too, it’s the elders’ job as shepherds to do something about it. They are to take it seriously and silence him but at the same time do it with compassion in mind.

**II. ELDERS ARE TO REBUKE AND ATTEMPT TO RESTORE THE OFFENDERS. (VV. 12-14)**

After they silence the false teacher and quit giving him a platform to teach, they are to rebuke him with the ultimate goal of seeing them come to know the truth.

**A. Rebuke their conduct. (vv. 12-13)**

This book talks a lot about how a child of God should conduct their life and that’s one of the things that Paul puts his finger on in the false teachers’ conduct and call them out on it. It’s as if he’s using an inside joke about Cretans to prove that they’re no different from the world – their teaching doesn’t result in transformation. Paul quotes this famous Cretan poet (a 5 to 6 centuries B.C. whose name was Epimenides), saying, “One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true.” They’ve stereotyped themselves in this conduct. They were liars like their god Zeus, evil beasts (the saying is that there were no beasts on the island except the Cretans themselves), and were lazy gluttons, willing to do anything to turn a profit as long as they could get out of work. What you’ll notice about many false teachers is that their lifestyle is as shaky as their teaching, even if outwardly they keep their religious rituals.

**B. Rebuke their teaching. (v. 14)**

Their poor integrity and lifestyle proves their teaching is false so he says in verse 13: “For this reason reprove them severely **so that they may be sound in the faith**, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.” He wants them sound in the faith. There’s another parallel passage in 2 Timothy 2:23-26 that says, “Refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.” So Paul still held out hope for even the false teacher, that he could be saved. It makes me wonder how many false teachers Paul led to the Lord himself. It does happen today as well.

This verse also reminds us of 1 Timothy 1:4, “remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless

genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith” (1 Tim. 1:4). Paul addresses two of their favorite subjects:

**1. Jewish myths.**

Jewish literature was filled with all sorts of myths and fables and philosophies and mystical numerology – they would assign certain numbers to letters and make strange interpretations out of it.

**2. Commandments of men.**

The phrase “commandments of men” is a biblical phrase we should be familiar with, especially from Jesus words in the gospel to the religious Pharisees. For these legalistic Jews, apparently the Mosaic Law wasn’t enough for them. They wanted more laws to make them purer and were always inventing more and more to the point that they actually had this **whole unwritten body of oral laws and traditions that they kept, which God had not commanded and at times would even contradict the Law itself. I want to show you one major instance.** Turn to Mark 7:1 and we’ll look at an instance Jesus had with guys like we’re dealing with here in Crete.

“The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, thus observing the traditions of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.) The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?”

So what you have going on is these religious Jews are upset because they didn’t wash their hands before they ate some of the food purchased, or maybe even ate while they walking home from the market and weren’t home where they would have had a chance to wash. Going to the market for the Pharisee made you defiled, being around unholy, filthy people. So this objection from the Pharisees is not just about sanitary reasons of soap and water, but about **a ceremonial ritual washing** made up by the elders that wasn’t in the God-given Law. This is still done today like this public wash station near the wailing wall in Jerusalem. Now I wash my hands a lot but not like Jews do according to their oral traditions. The first thing they do when they wake up is wash their hands. They wash before and after they eat. They wash before they pray. They wash after leaving a cemetery. They wash before and after a lot of things, unnecessarily and ritualistically. Even today, they are unnecessary burdens.

Mark7:6 continues: “And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites [‘He described you well!’], as it is written: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as the doctrines the precepts of men.’ Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.’ He was also saying to them, ‘You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. For Moses said, Honor your father and mother’; and, ‘he who speaks evil of father or mother, is to be put to death’; but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’ you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.” And Jesus goes on to explain that it is the things that come out of a man that defile him, like evil thoughts, adulteries, coveting, slander, and pride.

But basically to enrich themselves and avoid the Law's loving command to care for aging parents, the Pharisees in their greed would say that whatever they had was "Corban" or "given to God" so they didn't have to support them – **it was a manmade rule that supported their evil desires by cloaking it in an external purity ritual!** That kind of stuff was certainly creeping into churches. They would say that's great that you believe in Jesus but if you really want to be godly and pure or maintain purity, you have to keep these unspecified rituals and traditions as well. That gives us some understanding into verse 15 talking about purity because if these works are necessary then apparently the imputed righteousness of Christ isn't enough to make you pure. So Paul says in 2:1, teach sound doctrine.

### III. **ELDERS ARE TO EXHORT IN SOUND DOCTRINE. (VV. 1:15-2:1)**

Follow along closely with me in verse 15. This is quite the verse because if you fly through it, you'll miss the point. Paul is teaching on good works but the false teachers also taught works – here he distinguishes the two types of good works: "To the pure [**who are the pure? those who have believed on Christ**], all things are pure [**we could say their motives behind their good works is pure**]; but to those who are defiled [**"those" who don't understand the grace gospel**] and unbelieving [**they don't believe Christ's work was sufficient**], nothing is pure [**that they do. Why not? Because their motives for doing everything are all messed up! God does not accept a works-based righteousness**], but both their mind and their conscience are defiled [**they're so far off base they don't understand their error**].

If you don't believe that Jesus Christ is your all-sufficient Savior, everything you do or even try to do for the Lord is going to be improperly motivated by the flesh. Everything becomes some sort of work to you that you are doing to try to merit favor with God apart from the all-sufficient work of Christ. Paul says that is a defiled and unbelieving mindset. Our works do not save us and they never will. Titus is a book that emphasizes good works and the need for God's people to do good works – HOWEVER – if you think that it's your good works that are going to get you to heaven then you need to understand the grace gospel first! False teaching is a roadblock to the grace gospel.

❖ **Pure and worthy works are only possible once we trust Christ's perfect and all-sufficient work for us.**

Until we are fully trusting Christ, all of our works are like Isaiah 64:6 says – they are unclean and filthy rags. False teachers and those deceived by them, as we see in verse 16: "They profess to know God [**even to be near Him in 'purity'**], but by their deeds [**ritualistic works**] they [**actually do the exact opposite and**] deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." They do not truly know God because they haven't trusted completely in Christ which means with every act or deed they do to try to earn His favor, they are actually denying Christ. If you work for salvation, you deny Christ's sufficiency. Those work are detestable to God. They make you disobedient to the gospel. They are worthless.

If you died tonight and you were standing before God and He asked you, "Why should I let you into heaven?", how would you reply? If you reply with anything other than what He already did for you on the cross, like your good deeds or religious works, you are denying Christ. Look at Titus 3:5 friend: "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." **A good deed, no matter how good or wonderful it seems, is not rewarded or accepted by God unless it is done with the understanding that we are saved by grace and not on the basis of those deeds.**

Let's finish this with a parallel passage from Philippians 3:2-9. Paul says, "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." Beware of false teachers. Beware of not believing that Christ is sufficient for you. Beware of those ungodly men out there who, week after week, are teaching people straight into hell while they think they're being taught how to get to heaven. **Works will not save you. Only faith in Christ will get you into the glories of heaven for eternity.**

As we come to the communion table this morning, remind yourself that this is not a work you're doing to try to get to heaven but exactly the opposite: you are reminding yourself that the cross of Christ and His shed blood is totally sufficient to erase your sin. Maybe today, you've realized for the first time how detestable religious works and good deeds are if you use them as the basis by which to be accepted before God and you need to trust Christ completely now. In the quiet of your heart as the men pass around the bread and wine, talk to God and tell Him you are done trusting yourself and your own righteousness and you want to trust Jesus Christ as your all-sufficient Savior who died for your sins. You want to know this regenerating and renewing work of the Holy Spirit and learn to walk with Him in grace.

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<sup>1</sup> Church Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, Volume 11* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 313.