

# Titus Chapter One (vv.10-16)

## The Attacks of the Circumcision [vv.10-16]

- This paragraph describes the threat of false teachers (and their doctrine) to the assemblies in Crete. See also 3.9-11.
- These men were likely Jewish – of the ‘circumcision group’ (v.10), who claimed to be Christian but insisted on blending Christianity with Jewish legalism and traditions.
- They likely taught that Gentile believers needed to follow aspects of the Mosaic Law such as circumcision, dietary rules, or ceremonial observances to be saved, and live holy lives.
- The paragraph gives a vivid *portrait* of the false teachers, describing their *poison* (vv.10-12), their moral and spiritual *pollution* (v.15), and their inconsistent *profession* (v.16). In between is an exhortation to Titus to *preserve* the saints amid such danger (vv.13-14).
- The simple antidote to what is false (unhealthy) is good spiritual hygiene – producing spiritually healthy saints by teaching sound doctrine (vv.9, 13). This was vital to counteract defective teaching and disorderly conduct.

## The Portrait & Poison of the False Teachers [vv.10-12]

**v.10.** For there are many links back to the responsibility of the elders to both encourage the saints and expose the false teachers with sound apostolic teaching (v.9). There were already many false teachers leading the people astray – both the time frame (are) and the number (many) creating a sense of urgency. The false teachers are described in four ways:

- **unruly** [*anypotaktos*]. Elsewhere translated ‘disobedient’ (1 Timothy 1.9). The same word is used in v.6 of an elder’s children who must not be accused of “unruly” (rebellion). The false teachers were defiant of and unwilling to be subject to established authority – in this case, the authority of the word of God as taught by the apostles.
- **vain talkers** [*mataiologos*]. Lexicons give the meaning as ‘one idly speaking trivialities’, a ‘windbag’ or ‘someone whose talk is worthless drivel’. These men may have been fluent orators, but the content of what they say is empty.
- **deceivers** [*phrenapatēs*]. Lit. to ‘deceive the mind’, a ‘mind-misleader’. These men give a false impression with plausible arguments to actively mislead people into believing something that is not true.
- **specially they of the circumcision**. The word “specially” should be understood in the sense of ‘namely’ or ‘in other words’ (Towner). Paul is identifying the false teachers as those of the circumcision, i.e. Jews. As noted above, these men were likely Jewish teachers who professed to be Christians (cf. Acts 11.2; Colossians 4.11) and yet insisted on obligating believers to legalism, ceremony and rabbinic tradition. Many Jews lived on Crete (cf. Acts 2.11).

**v.11.** The **mouths** of these men **must be stopped** – they were to be silenced by reason. This would probably be achieved by the elders who are commanded to “convince” (rebuke) the gainsayers in such a way that they were silenced as their error was exposed by the truth of the word of God (v.9). The word **stopped** strictly means ‘to put a bridle, muzzle or gag in the mouth and thus by extension to bring to silence,’ (JA Kitchen). The present continuous tense suggests they were to be put to silence permanently. This could only be done by the irresistible presentation of divine truth.

The urgency of the action is suggested by the damaging activity of these men who **subvert whole houses**. The word “subvert” (upset) is a compound word from ‘up’ and ‘to turn’ and signifies to ‘ruin’ or ‘overthrow’. It is used literally in John 2.15 when the Lord Jesus upset the tables of the money changers in the temple. The phrase **whole houses** can refer either to the structure in which a family dwells or the people who live in the dwelling. Probably both are in view. The false teachers were disrupting entire Christian households by visiting their homes to pedal their error (cf. 2 Timothy 3.6). There is a twofold warning for our day. First, the Bible knows nothing of select groups of Christians from a particular church gathering in ‘house groups’. Early believers met in homes, but the entire assembly was present (Romans 16.5). There is a huge difference between a ‘house group’ and a ‘house church’! Small groups of Christians meeting together for Bible teaching is dangerous without the guidance of elders. They can easily become the source of the spread of spiritual gangrene (error), not to mention discontent and complaint. John Riddle says, “The homes of God’s people can so easily become hotbeds of discontent where trouble for the assembly is allowed to brew.” Second, a more significant concern these days is the free availability of, sometimes highly plausible, but *false* doctrine on the internet. Subversive teaching is piped into our homes on YouTube, and by AI. Always use reliable sources of Bible teaching.

The motivation of these men is money. They teach things **they ought not for filthy** [*aischros*] **lucre’s** [*kerdos*] **sake** – lit. ‘dishonest gain’. Thus, these men were more concerned with what they could get *out* of these people (materially), than what they could put *in* (doctrinally). Their motivation was selfish, rather than the glory of Christ – the teaching of such men can rarely be trusted. The Lord’s people must ever remember they are servants of Christ, not the servants of money or men (2 Timothy 4.3-4). The word *kerdos* (gain) describes whatever might be to one’s profit or advantage, and can therefore include, not only financial gain, but social advantage too. Whatever the form of gain, it was shameful (ugly).

Paul reminds us that “what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (Philippians 3.7). Dishonest gain was part of the lifestyle of the Cretans, as described in secular historical writings. As *Polybius* writes, “So much in fact do sordid love of gain and lust for wealth prevail among them, that the Cretans are the only people in the world in whose eyes no gain is disgraceful” (Hist. 6.46.3). *Cicero* wrote that Cretans regarded highway robbery as honourable.

**v.12.** Paul quotes from a secular Greek poet named Epimenides, a native of Crete. As such he was **one of themselves**. The purpose of the citation was to give an unbiased self-witness of Cretan character. This was the very kind of character displayed by these false teachers and reflected the standard of behaviour their teaching promoted. All was a far cry from the apostolic gospel. A **prophet of their own** underlines the philosopher’s personal, intimate and unbiased knowledge of his own people – one who would not speak out of malice as an enemy. Paul does not endorse him as a biblical prophet but simply notes he was esteemed as a prophet by his people – it was a title of honour used of great teachers and poets of the past. The witness of Epimenides was that **the Cretians are always liars** – which begs the question whether we can trust the testimony of Epimenides! Even the Greek verb *kretizein*, meaning ‘to lie’ or ‘to cheat’ (lit. ‘to act like a Cretan’), was coined precisely because of the ancient reputation of Cretans as habitual liars and deceivers. Their most famous falsehood was the claim that the tomb of the (immortal!) Zeus was on Crete. Epimenides also described the Cretans as **evil beasts**, behaving like wild animals, living by instinct and indulging sensual and immoral appetites and passions. It may also describe their fierce, somewhat barbaric nature being savage in their relationships with others. There was a tradition of warfare between the island’s cities, and piracy on the shipping routes that passed by Crete. Though not recorded here, Epimenides went on to joke that the absence of literal wild beasts on the island was supplied by its human inhabitants! **Slow bellies** or ‘lazy gluttons’ refers to their self-indulgence and uncontrolled greed (cf. Philippians 3.19).

#### **The Preservation of the Saints [vv.13-14]**

**v.13.** The Apostle Paul had evidently spent enough time on Crete to know that the **witness** of Epimenides **was true**. These false teachers embodied, in character and teaching, what was true of Cretan society. It was for this reason that Titus was to **rebuke them sharply**. Likely, those to be rebuked includes both the teachers themselves (see v.9) *and*, primarily, the believers who were listening to their teaching. These saints were disposed to follow them because of their own Cretan traits. That the saints are primarily in view is suggested by the contemplated outcome that they may be ‘healthy in the faith’. Those rebuked are also distinguished from those who ‘reject the truth’ (v.14). The word **rebuke** means to ‘sternly admonish’ and is the same word translated “convince” in relation to gainsayers (v.9). The correction was to be **sharp**, dealing incisively with the danger, like a surgeon cutting away cancerous tissue. This was a severe situation which called, not for words of diplomacy, but words of abrupt and decisive reproof. The rebuke is not vindictive, but for the preservation of the saints – that they might be **sound** [*hygiainō*] **in the faith**. Paul’s great concern is for doctrinal and spiritual health.

**v.14.** This verse further clarifies what it means to be healthy in the faith. Positively, it involves living soberly, righteously and godly (2.12). Negatively, it means **not giving heed** to the philosophies and traditions of men who have rejected divine truth. To ‘not give heed’ entails giving no time or attention to false doctrine. The particular concern was **Jewish fables** (myths), a problem in Ephesus as well as Crete (cf. 1 Timothy 1.4; 4.7; 2 Timothy 4.4). This included fanciful legends and extravagant tales added to patriarchs, prophets or events, drawing conclusions from speculative genealogical records or assigning mystical meanings to the numerical value of certain names (gematria). Such tall tales minister questions rather than godly edifying (1 Timothy 1.4) and have the potential to turn ears from the truth (2 Timothy 4.4). Paul was also concerned about the **commandments of men** which were likely legalistic Jewish demands in the form of a religious checklist. Paul specifies some of the commands in 1 Timothy 4.3, “Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats.” All these rules were propagated by men who habitually **turned** themselves away (middle voice) **from the truth**. The middle voice denotes a deliberate act of the will. If a person does not choose the truth of God’s word, any invention of men could grab their soul and carry them away.

#### **The Pollution and Profession of the False Teachers [vv.15-16]**

**v.15.** Given that Paul is speaking about Jewish traditions which included abstaining from certain foods, this verse must be read in the context of Jewish food laws. This was an old chestnut which the Lord Jesus faced with the Pharisees (Matthew 15.10-11; Mark 7.14-19) and took Peter some time to comprehend (Acts 10). The truth of Scripture is that there is no food that is unclean – all food is good to eat. Mark 7.19, “This he said, making all meats clean” [RV]. See also 1 Timothy 4.4-5.

Like the Pharisees, these false teachers likely prized external and ritual purity above the true purity which is internal and moral. Thus, says Paul, **Unto the pure all things are pure**. That is, to those who are spiritually pure (made pure by the work of Christ, cf. Titus 2.14), all things, in the sense of food (meat and drink), are pure for their use (Luke 11.41). Believers need not fear contamination from food. “All things” obviously does not include moral impurity. Such could never be regarded as pure by a God-fearing believer. William MacDonald helpfully says, “This verse has absolutely nothing to do with things that are sinful in themselves and condemned in the Bible. Paul has *not* been speaking about matters of clear-

cut morality, of things that are inherently right or wrong. Rather, he has been discussing matters of moral indifference, things that were ceremonially defiling for a Jew living under the law but that are perfectly legitimate for a Christian living under grace. To the born-again believer all foods are clean.”

But, by way of contrast, for them that are **defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure**. This means that to those who are spiritually unclean (because of unbelief), nothing is pure – even though they may abstain from certain foods. Towner says, “Ironically, the condition of defilement they hoped to avoid by rigorous attention to rituals is precisely the one (only in its deepest sense) in which they find themselves.” It is not what a person eats that defiles him, but what comes out of his heart (Mark 7.20-23). These individuals are impure by nature. Mentally, their **minds** are **defiled** [*miainō*]; morally, their **consciences** are stained. The word *miainō* means to become discoloured by dye, thus, to pollute or contaminate. The minds of these false teachers have become dysfunctional – they fail to apprehend the truth and actively resist it (v.14). The conscience is an ‘eyewitness’ within which either accuses or excuses an individual’s actions (Romans 2.14-15). Their consciences have likewise become dysfunctional, making them incapable of making correct decisions about conduct.

**v.16.** These men have an inconsistent profession – their lip and life do not agree. Their profession of knowing God is nullified and contradicted by the way they live. In character, they are abominable. In creed, they are disobedient. In conduct, unto every good work reprobate.

They **profess** [*homologeō*] **that they know** [*oida*] **God**. The word *homologeō* literally means ‘to say the same thing’, to agree. These men made public confession of knowing God, over against the pagans who did not know God. Significantly, the word *oida* stresses knowledge that is gained by learning or information – not personal experience. This is the pride of Jewish religious privilege – claiming a better knowledge of God. But their claim is empty – these men stand condemned by the test of conduct. In **works** they **deny** (contradict) the God they profess to know. The word “works” becomes highly significant in Titus, five times referring to the “good works” which are the product of genuine faith (2.7, 14; 3.1, 8, 14).

As to their character, these men are **abominable** – loathsome or detestable to God. The word describes those who pervert moral standards – they are as repulsive to God as idolatry (Mark 13.14). As to creed, they are **disobedient** to the word of God, willfully adhering to man-made rules and regulations. As a result, and as to conduct, they are **unto every good work reprobate** [*adokimos*] or “unfit for any good deed” [NET]. The word *adokimos* refers to being proved worthless (substandard) having failed the test. William Barclay says the word was used to describe a counterfeit coin which fell below standard weight, a cowardly soldier who fails in the testing hour of battle, or a flawed or misshapen stone which the builders rejected (it was marked with a capital A, for *adokimos*, and left to one side, as being unfit to have any place in the building). These false teachers were so rejected because when their profession to know God was tested by their observable life (works), they were exposed as fraudulent and rejected as worthless. These men were quite the opposite of Apelles who passed the test with flying colours (Romans 16.10)!