

## **Beware of Modern Antinomianism** **Titus 1:10-2:10**

As we continue to work through the book of Titus this morning, we are going to see Paul give instructions to Titus about how to address a particular false teaching on the island of Crete that was already causing problems for the new churches and Christians. It's a kind of false teaching that is still prevalent in churches today, only in a different form and it's easy to fall into if you don't fully understand the gospel. Unfortunately I've had firsthand experience in the past with people from East Lincoln who have been sucked into it and left the church. Worse than that, they have a false assurance of their salvation that goes beyond what the Bible says. So it's really important for us to see what it is and guard ourselves from falling into it.

This week we'll see what it looked like in Crete, and what it looks like in America. We'll also see how Paul told Titus to counteract it with his teaching. Then next week we'll see Paul give an accurate teaching of the gospel and see how his instructions for biblical conduct fall in line with that. My hope is that these two sermons will reveal if you're caught up in it as well as clarify an accurate understanding of the gospel.

The basic question that gets to the root of this false teaching is: What does our conduct have to do with our salvation? Does it really matter how we live as long as we believe in Jesus? This whole sermon series is about transformation and making an impact in our world today by experiencing transformation in our lives. But what motivates us to pursue transformation? Is it just so that people can see Christ in us? Or is there more to it than that? Does transformation matter when it comes to our own salvation? Let's dig into the text and start to answer these questions.

After telling Titus to appoint elders in the churches on Crete, the last qualification he told him to look for was those who were holding firm to the trustworthy word as taught so they could give instruction in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradict it. Now he goes on to describe those who were contradicting it.

Read Titus 1:10-16.

*For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. <sup>11</sup> They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. <sup>12</sup> One*

*of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." <sup>13</sup> This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, <sup>14</sup> not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. <sup>15</sup> To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. <sup>16</sup> They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.*

So this is describing the false teachers on Crete who were causing problems, and Paul says in verse 10 that the ones causing the most problems were those of the "circumcision party." That indicates that they had a Jewish background. Paul also says in verse 14 that they were devoting themselves to "*Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.*" In almost every town that Paul went to there was a pre-existing Jewish community, and the same thing was true on Crete. But this Jewish community was different than those we read about in Israel. These were Cretan Jews and Paul makes it clear that their behavior was detestable, falling in line with what other Cretans were like.

I've been quoting verse 12 all month and now we see the context that Paul uses it in. He's describing the Cretan Jewish false teachers when he quotes one of their own prophets: "*Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.*" So that's what these guys were like – evil beasts like everyone else, and they were going about the island spreading false teaching. Paul says in verse 10 that they were "*insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers,*" and in verse 11 that they were "*upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.*"

So this is a very interesting combination – Cretan beasts and Judaism. The Jewish leaders that we read about in Israel were evil on the inside, but their outward conduct looked righteous. Jesus said they were like "whitewashed tombs." But the false teachers on Crete didn't try to hide their wicked behavior at all. They were just as bad as everyone else, only they also had a background in Judaism. How could that be? How could they get away with that?

There are clues in this passage that point to a false teaching called Gnosticism, which is one of the forms of something called Antinomianism. These are big words, so let me explain. The Reformation Study Bible defines antinomianism very simply – it means: "opposed to law." It also says, "*Antinomian views are those denying that God's law in Scripture should directly control the Christian's*

*life.*” In other words, Christians don’t have to obey biblical commands when it comes to their conduct. How could anyone think that way?

There are several forms of antinomianism and one of them is called Gnosticism. This was a big problem in the early churches. According to the Reformation Study Bible, *“The Gnostics taught that salvation was for the soul only, making bodily behavior irrelevant both to God’s interest and to the soul’s health. The conclusion was that one may behave riotously and it will not matter.”* So they separated the soul and the body in salvation. The body was evil and there was nothing that could change that, so your outward behavior had no bearing on your salvation – you could do whatever your fleshly cravings led you to do. But the soul was redeemable and could be saved through special knowledge and probably faith in some cases.

These beliefs were quite prevalent in that part of the world, and that’s what I think was going on with the false teachers on Crete. Look at what Paul says in verses 15-16: There are all kinds of characteristics of Gnosticism mentioned in these verses. In verse 15 Paul contradicts Gnostic beliefs by saying: *“To the pure, all things are pure (even the body), but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure (not even the soul); but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.”* And then in verse 16 he makes it even clearer when he says: *“They profess to know God (mind/soul), but they deny him by their works (bodily behavior). They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.”* That fits Gnosticism to a “T”. The false teachers could be *“liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons”* while professing some form of Judaism, and it didn’t matter.

So I think they were teaching people that their behaviors didn’t matter. “You can live however you want and your soul will still be saved.” In their version of Gnosticism, as long as you devoted yourself to Jewish myths and the commands of the false teachers you were saved. I think that’s what the new churches were facing, which is why Paul told Titus to rebuke them sharply. They must be silenced. They were not to be allowed to teach in the churches or in the homes of the new believers.

Of all the false religions on the island, this one was the greatest concern. Probably because it had similar roots to Christianity and could be less obvious than other false teachings, therefore it could be easier for new believers to fall into it. Additionally, because of the Jewish element to it and those similar roots with Christianity, unbelieving Cretans might lump the false teachers together with the

genuine believers and have a completely distorted view of Christianity, which would ruin the Christian witness.

Conduct matters. Obedience to biblical commands matters. Transformation matters. It matters when it comes to making an impact for Christ on other people, but it also matters when it comes to salvation. Next week we're going to look at that more fully and how obedience fits into a right understanding of the gospel. For now we're just going to look at what Paul told Titus to do to counteract the effects of the false teachings, which is what he does at the beginning of chapter 2. And then we're going to talk about what this false teaching looks like today.

Read Titus 2:1-10.

*But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. <sup>2</sup> Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. <sup>3</sup> Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, <sup>4</sup> and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, <sup>5</sup> to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. <sup>6</sup> Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. <sup>7</sup> Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, <sup>8</sup> and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. <sup>9</sup> Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, <sup>10</sup> not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.*

People like to use these verses as a code of conduct for Christian behavior. That's certainly what this was for – for the people in Crete. But I also want us to see that the main point I think Paul is trying to get across is that it's not ok for Christians to continue to live like Cretans. Christians must be different. And in that culture, these were some of the specific ways that Christians should be different.

- Older men shouldn't be like wicked Cretan men. Be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.
- Older women, don't be like wicked Cretan women. Be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. Teach what is good, and so train the young women...

- Young women, don't be like your unbelieving friends. Love your husband and children, be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to your husband.
- Young men, don't be wild beasts like your unbelieving friends. Be self-controlled.
- Bondservants, don't be rebellious like your fellow workers. Be submissive to your masters in everything; be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith.

These are the kinds of ways that Cretan Christians should behave, whatever their situation was. They were to live in accordance with the word of God, no longer in wickedness like everyone else. The false teachers were dead wrong – behavior does matter. And this kind of behavior would contradict what they were teaching.

Like I said, next week we're going to look at why this is so important and what Paul writes about how obedience is embedded in an accurate understanding of the gospel. But for now I want to share how I see this false teaching playing out in Christian churches today.

To some degree I think it would be appealing to all of us if we could live however we wanted and still have confidence that we're going to inherit eternal life – kind of like having a trump card that we can pull out that no matter what, guarantees our salvation. We don't always like what God's Word tells us to do. Sometimes it restricts us from doing what we want to do and sometimes it commands us to do things we don't really want to do. And with our limited human understanding we don't always see the benefits in what God commands us to do.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could figure out a way to ignore some biblical commands and still have confidence that we're saved? I think this is a common desire among most Christians at some point in their journey and I think it's a significant factor behind some of the modern antinomian beliefs. There are many ways that professing Christians condone their own sinful behavior and that of others.

I'll name a few I see... In Lutheran Churches I've seen a mentality by some that as long as a person is baptized and confirmed, the rest doesn't really matter. In Catholic Churches I've seen people believe that as long as they follow the sacraments they're covered and as long as they don't commit a mortal sin, the rest aren't as big of a deal and they'll eventually end up in heaven. In many Mainline Protestant churches I've seen people deny clear biblical teaching and

commands about creation, marriage, gender, and sexual orientation, saying that they don't apply in our historical and cultural context anymore therefore we don't need to obey them.

But we're not Lutheran or Catholic or Mainline Protestant and we typically don't think those ways. We're Evangelical, yet we have our own version of Antinomianism that's very common. This is an example of an argument I've run into on several occasions... *"The Bible teaches us that people are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and apart from works. Therefore, it is necessary for me to have faith in Jesus in order to be saved, but it is not necessary that I obey the biblical commands about my behavior. Those commands are part of sanctification and rewards in heaven, not salvation. As long as we believe in Jesus we will be saved, even if we live a carnal/sinful lifestyle."*

So that's what I would call Evangelical Antinomianism. You have to have faith, but you don't really have to obey. Churches teach that. People believe that. And I think a lot of it stems from a reaction against legalism and works-based righteousness in Fundamentalist churches or Catholicism. But I think it goes too far in the other direction. And it becomes another way that we deny that God's law in Scripture should directly control our lives. It diminishes the value of obeying God's Word to such a low level that we can basically take it or leave it as long as we're willing to give up a few rewards in heaven. And I agree, there will be fewer rewards in heaven if we walk in disobedience. But we also might not be there! And that's the danger in that way of thinking. It gives false assurance beyond what the Bible says. I don't think it's an accurate understanding of the gospel based on a bunch of Bible passages, including the one we're going to look at next week. If that view is correct, then much of the teaching and all of the warnings to Christians about the need for them to repent of sinful behaviors are practically worthless. If Paul or Peter or John thought that way, the New Testament would be a lot shorter than it is.

The big question I have for you is: Do you think that way? If you do, I hope that I'm at least waving a red flag of caution in front of you and that you'll take a deeper look at what the gospel teaches about obedience and salvation. I think it's obvious that Paul is absolutely opposed to the false teaching that says we don't really need obedience or transformation. And next week we're going to see why. But you don't have to wait until next week. You can go ahead and study what Paul says next.