

# The Need For Teaching Elders

by Ron R. Ritchie

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I suspect many of you saw the headline in the San Jose Mercury last week, "Pious Investors Lose Faith, Money." Let me read a portion of the story:

Jim, by all accounts, was likable, humble, devout--even "charismatic." He espoused biblical principles in the investment seminars he put on in a half-dozen Christian churches in the San Jose area. Jim was an elder in his church. He carried a Bible to work every day. He led prayer meetings in his home in San Jose area on Thursday evenings. He prayed with his clients. He also preyed on them, according to a San Jose investigator . . . Said one client, "The one thing that really got to the bunch of us was that he professed to be such a Christian, and he did so many opposite things. The biggest blow was that his Christianity was such a facade." Jim, who operated Advanced Financial Planning first in San Jose and then in Milpitas, has filed for bankruptcy. . . By his own estimate, he has left 115 creditors with nearly half a million dollars in unsecured debts. Mismanagement was a part of the problem, but so were forgery, grand theft and the filing of false documents . . .

If we did a review of history--especially from God's point of view--we would find that ever since the Garden of Eden Satan has sought to deceive the "seed of the woman" (the children of God); that someone in every generation is constantly seeking to come up with a half truth, to say to those who want to follow Jesus Christ, "Did God really say you couldn't eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Did he really say that? "

The Scriptures say that "the deceiver," Satan, has consistently sent false prophets and wicked shepherds to the nation of Israel, and he has consistently set such people against believers in the church of Jesus Christ. Those false prophets try to pick off the weak ones in the flock, never the strong. They come disguised as "angels of light," as Paul says in 2 Corinthians; they come with a different gospel, a different spirit and a different Jesus. They come carrying their Bibles; they even pray with us on Wednesday nights.

But God has a counterattack. He sends forth good shepherds to guard the sheep from the false prophets from within the camp, and from the wolves who come from outside of the camp. The Lord sends elders in every generation, ever since the time when Israel was in Egypt.

In the first message on Titus last week, we saw that the apostle Paul instructed Titus to "appoint elders in every city as I directed you." Those elders were to "hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that they may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." (Titus 1:9) One of our own godly elders, Barney Brogan, shared his ministry with us this morning. In all the time I have known him, he has held fast to the Word of God so that we might grow spiritually healthy and strong, so that we might not be picked off by the wolves and the false prophets.

The second qualification of godly elders, Paul says, is that they are to "refute those who contradict." Elders are to come alongside the false prophets, the wolves, and point out to them where they have gone wrong, hoping to bring them to repentance. These people are not to be avoided: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever [that includes false prophets and wolves] believes in Him will not perish but will have everlasting life."

Elders have the same problems as you and I, the same temptations as you and I. They have to rely on the Spirit of God in order to do all that God has asked them to do among the flock. Elders must be able to teach the Word of God, to use the Word of God to build up, to rebuke and reprove. Such is the kind of man Paul

wanted to shepherd the church in Crete, which had strong Christians, weak Christians, false prophets, Judaizers and wolves ( Pharisees).

"A man is not justified by works of law but through faith in Christ Jesus "

In the section we will look at this morning, Paul instructs Titus and the elders in Crete on how to deal with these problem people.

#### 1. The Need For Godly Elders To Teach, Titus 1:10-13

**For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith.**

These "rebellious men" were not subject to the apostles, to the Word of God, or to the Spirit of God. They were men like Diotrephes, whom John speaks about in his third letter:

I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church.

Another example of a rebellions man is Alexander the coppersmith, whom Paul delivered him over to Satan for his blaspheming ways, for "he did us much harm."

Paul goes on to list the "empty talkers." These are vain, fruitless, non-profitable people. Their words sound wonderful but they never really say anything; no fruit results from their ministry. Writing to Timothy in Ephesus, Paul said, ". . . Avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk spreads like gangrene . . . for men are saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some." (2 Tim. 2:16-17)

The third group Paul talks about are the "deceivers." These are the ones who go about preaching a half truth. That is the very characteristic of Satan himself--he is a deceiver: "For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist." (2 John 7) This is characteristic of all the cults. If you want to know what they teach, find out what they say about Jesus Christ. Someone gave me three gigantic volumes called "The Course On Miracles." To save time I just looked at the section about Jesus Christ. The book denied that he had come in the flesh, thus the authors of this book are "deceivers."

Paul next mentions the group, "especially those of the circumcision," i.e., those who come from within the Jewish nation. The early church consisted mainly of Jews who received the baptism of the Holy Spirit (i.e., they were placed into the body of Christ and given spiritual gifts to function within the body). These Jewish Christians continued to attend the synagogue and temple services, thinking that they were a reformed group within Judaism to declare to others that Jesus was the Christ.

But then Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey with the news that God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. The Judaizers quickly followed, teaching that unless the Gentiles were circumcised according to the customs of Moses they could not be saved. (Acts 15:1) Their argument went like this: "Since circumcision is an outward demonstration of God's covenant with Abraham (and Jesus has come to fulfill that covenant), in reality, in order to become Christians, Gentiles had to be circumcised before they could inherit all the promises of that covenant." This was the point of debate that led to the Council at Jerusalem. Paul, Barnabas, Titus and others traveled to Jerusalem to seek the counsel of the apostles and elders over this issue. Following Peter's great address at that meeting, the Council agreed that Gentile converts

did not have to be circumcised and obey the law of Moses. That put an end to the Judaizers' case, but not to the Judaizers. They continued to hound Paul, Barnabas and Peter in their ministry for Jesus Christ during all the intervening years, right up to the time this letter was written, about 65 A.D. Church history tells us that Judaizers were showing up in Moscow as late as 1450 to harass the church.

I was raised in a Catholic church, and was taught that I received salvation in Christ, but I had to do good works. Then I was saved, and the Protestant church taught me, "You're saved by grace, but you can't play baseball on Sunday." Judaism enters when anything is added to the grace of God. Paul writes in Galatians, quoting his own words when he confronted Peter at Antioch: "We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus . . . since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified." All of us who stand before Jesus Christ and the Father know that we are there by grace alone, that we have "justification by faith, not by works, lest any man should boast." There is not one thing we can add to our salvation --except a heart filled with thanksgiving. Nothing else is acceptable. Having received the love of Christ, the forgiveness of Christ, having received the Holy Spirit, we find our hearts longing to serve him, not because we want to add something to our salvation, but because we have thankful hearts.

On Monday last my wife and I were involved with a stream of people who kept arriving at my house one after another. At 9 p.m. my wife was still witnessing to some man downstairs, while I was lying on the bed upstairs, not knowing whether to go to sleep or tell her we hadn't eaten all day. Finally she came running upstairs and said, "I'm so excited. Let me take you to dinner." I thought, "This is wonderful. We have been so busy we haven't even had a chance to eat." We spent the whole time in the restaurant reviewing what God had done in our lives that day. We were just as surprised as you would be, because we did not plan it. It had nothing to do with our salvation, rather what happened occurred as a result of our salvation.

Paul now goes on to instruct Titus and the Cretan elders on how to deal with these false prophets. What should they do with these rebellious people, empty talkers, deceivers and Judaizers who were "upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach"? "They must be silenced," the apostle says. He does not mean "muzzle them." Rather, what he means is to preach the Word of God, under the authority of the Holy Spirit, in such a way that such people will come to a place of conviction and confession.

These groups taught strange doctrines "for the sake of sordid gain." (vs. 11) They wanted to make money, filthy, deceptive money, not legitimate money. The Cretans had a lust for wealth. Polybius, a second century father has written, "Money is so highly valued among them that its possession is not only thought to be necessary, but highly creditable. In fact, greed and insatiable desire for wealth are so native to the soil of Crete that they are the only people among whom no stigma attaches itself to any sort of gain whatsoever." Business is business. These false prophets wanted to make a fast buck, and they did it off the Christians like the "elder" the San Jose Mercury wrote about. I am reminded of those in the electronic church, many of whom are ripping off the Christian community. Here at PBC, I have been present in many meetings with the elders and staff and I have to say that we have a very wonderful group of men who fight all the time against the temptation for gain. They are always watching and guarding that area.

Paul goes on to quote a Cretan poet to prove his point. He certainly has the Judaizers in mind, those self-centered, greedy people who were out for their own evil pleasures. He quotes Epimenides, a poet who lived 600 years earlier: "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons'." Paul's inference is clear: for once a Cretan liar is telling the truth! Six hundred years later, Paul's observation is, "Cretans are still liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons."

Paul goes on to instruct Titus and the elders not to avoid these false prophets and Judaizers, not to get rid of them, but to address them and all who have been deceived by them: "For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith." The words "reprove" and "refute" here mean "to bring to conviction," to bring people to a place where they see that they have been wrong so they will confess their sins and come to a right relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul instructs Titus to "reprove them severely" for teaching false doctrine, for their deceitful tactics, impure motives and selfish lifestyle. What is a "severe rebuke"? Acts 8 gives a good example. Simon the magician sees a whole group of people receive the gifts of the Spirit under the ministry of the apostles John and Peter. "Another trick for my magic show," thinks Simon, who asks,

**"Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."**

It's never easy for elders to have to become involved in such a rebuke, but it's absolutely necessary for the weak who have been deceived, and for the false prophets, that they might truly come to know Jesus Christ. As difficult as it seems, a rebuke can bring forth spiritual health and salvation. "That they may be sound in the faith," is the key here. True faith does not practice legalism, disunity, greed or selfishness. True faith produces freedom to serve Christ, unity of the Spirit among the brothers, a generous spirit and a Christ-centered life--the very things the Judaizers sought to quench.

Remember that there were four groups in the church in Crete: the strong believers, the weak believers, the false prophets, and the Judaizers. Then there were the "wolves." In this context, these would have been the Pharisees, who were seeking to influence the Judaizers, to pull them back into their fold, hoping that all the Jews who had come to know Jesus Christ would come back into the synagogue. The spiritual battle was intense. In the next section, Paul instructs Titus and the elders what to do about these people.

## 2. Don't Pay Attention To Jewish Theology

Titus 1:14-16

**... not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. 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. They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed.**

"Do not pay attention to the fables and myths of these wolves, these Pharisees." "Old wives' tales," Paul calls these fables in his letter to Timothy. But people still believed these myths, Joseph Gaer, a modern Jewish authority, writing on Jewish literature and legends, says, "In their nostalgic recollection of biblical times, preachers often went far beyond anything implied in the Scripture narrative. The more romanticized the stories, the more the people liked them." "The Book of Jubilee," a commentary by Jewish authors on the book of Genesis, is embellished so much that the truth can hardly be discerned. Three of the points in that commentary say, "The reason we keep the Sabbath is because the archangels kept the Sabbath; the reason we know that circumcision is so valuable is because angels were circumcised; and Jacob never tricked anybody." Avoid such people, Paul says.

Every generation has its own myths and fables. In my Catholic upbringing, I heard teachers embellish the lives of dear Mary and the saints so much it was impossible to tell truth from error. The Mormons tell great stories about Christ and the American Indians, but those stories are myths, fables. Today, we have among us in the evangelical camp myth-tellers who try to identify the antichrist for us. Others spend their time trying to figure out the date of Christ's return. They do not study the whole counsel of God's Word so they start to embellish, to build their theories until you cannot even find the truth anymore.

**"In vain do they worship me teaching as their doctrine the precepts of men "**

Nor should they pay attention to the commandments of men," Paul continues (verse 14). It was bad enough that the Pharisees were advocating the Law of Moses and the dietary laws, but they also added new kosher laws. Referring to the Pharisees, Jesus quoted Isaiah, "In vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines precepts of men." The Pharisees added even more burdens to the Law so that the people were bent under the weight of further legalism.

Ed Wood hall and I took our children to Israel about four years ago. On the Sabbath we saw a lot of people who were wearing black hats and coats, eating in a restaurant. Wanting to be as authentic as possible, we went to that restaurant to eat. The waiter brought us soup right away; then bread was served. About halfway through the meal, a Jewish waiter came by and said, "Could I have your ticket?" "What ticket?" I asked. He said, "You've got to have a ticket. You can't eat here without a ticket." I said, "I'll just give you money." "Oh, no! We can't touch money! If we do it's like working on the Sabbath. We need a ticket." "How do I get one?" I asked. He said, "You have to buy it on Friday." I said, "I wasn't here Friday." We had already eaten half the meal, so he said, "I'll be right back." He went behind a wall in the kitchen, then came out and said, "The maitre d' will see you behind the wall after you've finished your meal." After we had finished, we went back to the maitre d'. Even a blind man could tell what would happen next. This man said, "I don't want the rabbis' (who were eating on the other side of the wall) "to see money being exchanged." I said, "But doesn't God see you?"

"Do not pay attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth," Paul writes. These people repudiated the truth. They became reprobates because they heard the truth in the ministry of Jesus Christ, they heard it on the day of Pentecost, they heard it during the early days of the church in Jerusalem, they heard it from the Christians on Crete, they heard it from Paul and Titus and yet they turned away from it. Here Paul attacks the self-righteousness of the Pharisees who merely obeyed the Law outwardly yet labeled the new Christians unclean because they were breaking the kosher and the Levitical laws. "To the pure all things are pure," Paul says. The way you become pure is not by outward activity, but by submitting your life and your heart to the cleansing blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The way you become pure is to believe by faith that Jesus Christ is the Savior of mankind, and he will change your heart. And the way to keep our heart clean, according to 1 John, is to "Confess our sins and he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us continually from all unrighteousness." So to the pure all things are pure. Writing to Timothy during this same period, Paul says, "Men who . . . advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude." (1 Tim. 4:3-4)

Then Paul directs his remarks to the Pharisees: "But to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled." The apostle points out that the Pharisees\_who regarded themselves as clean--because of their refusal to be cleansed by Jesus Christ their Messiah, their hearts, their minds, wills, and spirits were defiled and polluted. Everything they did, thought and said was polluted: "They profess to know God, but by their deed they deny him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." By their words and by their actions the Pharisees sought to demonstrate their obedience to God's law, but Jesus in Matthew 23 called them, "hypocrites, blind guides, filled with deceit, whitewashed tombs filled with dead men's bones." Paul, who used to be a Pharisee, should certainly know about them. Jesus said, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also." (Matt. 23:25-26) And that can only happen by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. As a result of rejecting Jesus Christ, the fruit of their lives was abominable and detestable. They were "worthless" men, counterfeits, phonies, and everything they did was phony.

To summarize: Paul, by the hand of God, saw the need for godly elders in the church in Crete, and he directed Titus to appoint such. These elders were to be teachers who would exhort believers in sound doctrine, and refute those who contradicted that Word. As shepherds, they were to be alert to false prophets, to Judaizers, and to legalism; with the Word as their authority, they were to refute them and the believers who fell into their traps, so that they would be brought to a place of conviction and confession. Finally, the elders in Crete were not to pay any attention to these people, as the fruit of their labors was rotten.

Just as in the church in Crete, believers in our day need godly elders to teach them sound doctrine so that they may experience the full knowledge of the truth which produces a Christ-like life; elders who will be on the alert to guard the flock from the false prophets within and from the wolves without.

Now no one has asked me to say this. For all the time I've been here, God has appointed, by the Holy Spirit,

godly elders to shepherd us so that we might be spiritually healthy. I have watched them over the years as they have guarded us from false prophets, from Judaizers and from wolves. We are so blessed; we are so rich. Phil Christ, would you thank the Lord on our behalf?

Our Heavenly Father, thank you that we are set free because of the truth that you gave us in Jesus Christ. Thank you for the faithful men you have appointed among us, shepherds who do not lord it over us but men who teach, feed and guide us. Thank you that you have given them to us so that we might walk in spiritual health, that we might be aware of false prophets, we might recognize legalism that is binding, that we might be aware of the wolves that seek to pick off the weak ones. Thank you that we have been blessed by your Hand as you have put among us in this generation, in this city, in this church, godly elders who are teachers of your Word. Bless them richly, bless their families and their ministries. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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