

Shut Their Mouths

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Bible Text: Titus 1:10-11

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Please be seated.

We're looking today at Titus chapter 1 verses 10 and 11. Titus chapter 1 verses 10 and 11. Allow me to read these two verses. "For there are many unruly men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced, who subvert whole houses by teaching for dishonest gain things they ought not to teach." I'll read on, [vs 12-16] "One of them, a prophet of their own, said, 'The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, and idle gluttons!' This witness is true. So rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure. But to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure. Even their minds and consciences are defiled. They profess that they know God, but in their deeds they deny Him, being abom- abominable, disobedient, and worthless for every good work." The grass withers and the flower fades but the Word of our God stands forever.

These two verses are part of a paragraph that goes on and we will, in the coming weeks, walk through the rest of this paragraph. But for today, we're looking at verses 10 and 11 which, again, say, "For there are many unruly men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced, who subvert whole houses by teaching for dishonest gain things they ought not teach." And we see in this that an elder MUST BE verses 5 through 9 that we spent the last few times together looking through, that an elder must BE that to shut the mouths of those who would harm the peace, unity, and purity of the church, in both obvious AND subtle ways. The elder must BE those things to shut the mouths of those who would harm the peace, unity, and purity of the church, in both obvious AND subtle ways.

Firstly, we see that shepherding the flock can be dirty business. We said before there must be teaching, there must be discipleship, there must be theological education. Why? Well, Paul tells us that there are many unruly men who must be silenced. That doesn't sound nice, that doesn't sound cordial. That sounds like Paul has an agenda, that he is thinning the herd in some ways. Why must there be this teaching of elders, this discipleship of elders, this theological education of elders and pastors? Why? Because not everybody is a clean, fluffy sheep. I wish I could stand before you and say, "Boy, everybody here at Trinity is just clean and tidy and everything in order. Just so nice and soft." But that's not the case. Perhaps all of you are thinking, "why is he talking about me from the pulpit?" We all know the things that we struggle with, the sins that so easily beset us. We all KNOW that we are not shiny, clean, fluffy sheep. George Scipione, a good friend in the ministry and mentor, says, "remember, sheep baaaa at one end and they do other things at the other end. This is the reality of the imagery of working with sheep." And I would add: remember that undershepherds are also sheep. We have our

frailties but we are simultaneously called to stand in the fray for YOUR sakes, beloved. To fight off those who, yes, would lead you astray with blatant heresy, but also those who would lead your hearts astray through that which is not NECESSARILY bad but causes strife and contention among the flock. There are rebellious, unruly men and they must be silenced.

Well, who are these unruly men, these rebellious men? Paul expands that a little bit by calling them "empty talkers and deceivers." So, secondly, we see that empty talkers and deceivers must be silenced. And as I thought about my experience in the church growing up and- and moving in a reformed direction and coming into a reformed church, I thought about: who are these empty talkers and deceivers who must be silenced? Again, Paul is not necessarily warning Titus about those who teach blatant heresy. That there is a shading and coloring here of those who are simply there for the wrong motives, who have alternate agendas to the agenda of the Gospel and the ordained leadership of the church. Those who are just about THEMSELVES. And in my experience, empty talkers and deceivers tend to simply set THEMSELVES up as the standard. That they think in ways beyond ALL of-- we all think at times: "boy, if everybody was just more like me it would be so much easier to get along." But they take it to a whole nother level of setting THEMSELVES up as the standard.

And so I thought of six people that I've met in the church, and I'm going to name them, okay? First, we have Pat the Puritan who is always reading. It's not a matter of if the author is dead, he will only read books by men who have been dead so long. There's a particular standard there, anything past 1699 is completely irrelevant to the church and to the Gospel. Again, it's not that the Puritans were BAD. I think that, you know, rotten tomatoes might come-- canned tomatoes might come flying at me if I were to say that, and appropriately so. But we have a particular danger when we take a particular slice of a particular time in a particular place and we begin to impose that ideology in ALL times and all places. We have to be wise in how we read and how we apply. Again, we don't ignore, again, we don't shun, again, we don't say, "well, that's old so it's irrelevant." No, that's the opposite problem. But we have to realize that we don't live in the seventeenth century, we live in the twenty-first. Reminds me of a pastor a number of years ago who, upon his first time stepping into a pulpit as the ordained and installed pastor said, "it's an honor and pleasure to be your pastor and- and I can't wait to take this- this church into the nineteenth century." And one of the elders was right behind him and said, "Hey- hey, it's the twentieth century." He said, "we're going to take this one century at a time." We live in the twenty-first century, brothers and sisters. And so, the Puritans need to inform what we do but the Puritans are not the totality of who we are and what we know and understand about the Scriptures.

Now that you're all relieved that I'm not naming actual people, we can go on. There's Henry the Halfling. He's the guy that's kinda reformed. This is the guy that is possibly in the stage cage-- the- the- the cage stage of Calvinism where he's ready to fight anybody. Just throw me into a box and I will conform them to my ways. Perhaps you've met some of those, perhaps you've walked away, or crawled away, from some of those types of people. But at the end of the day they're "kinda reformed" because, again, it's THEIR understanding of reformed theology. They have the opposite problem of Pat. Pat can't get past a certain era. Henry the Halfling can't get back to a certain era. The sum of his existence is a Baptist guy up and Minneapolis and another guy in the suburbs of Chicago with lots of tattoos and maybe a really smooth guy up in New York City. And to him, that is reformed theology and that's all he needs. He's a halfling, he's not fully invested in the full teaching of Scripture.

Then we have Sue the Social Justice Warrior. This is the person who's always ready to take on the next cause and NOBODY in the church is as sensitive as she is to ALL social justice issues. She, after THOUSANDS of years, is the first one who understands what it really takes for recon- ray- a- racial reconciliation, to understand what it REALLY takes to minister to the poor. And her greatest problem is

the scourge of all these other people who just want to talk about the truth of Scripture and the theology of the church all the time. Again, we should be concerned about social justice. These are ideas that are mentioned specifically in Scripture but that is not ALL the church is or is about.

Well, then there's Curtis the Covenanter, par excellence. No one, not even the covenanters themselves, were as covenanter as he is. He might even show up in a kilt on occasion to to some places. And HE holds to the true religion. He holds to it like they used to back in the old country. Well, before I move on, just let me say, no he doesn't. No he doesn't.

There's also Ian the Integrationist, who wants to take all of the modern study and understanding of people and wants to flood the church with it and say, "well the the Scriptures are nice, but it doesn't give us the whole picture. We NEED all of these things to really understand people and to really help them and to really counsel them and to really help them see healing in all of their issues and all of their syndroms and all of the their problems."

And then there's Sully the Syncretist. Who in the end, if you really get down to it, just wants the Christian religion to be one of many things in which he is borrowing from here and there and "wouldn't this be neat?" Remember, most heresies begin by somebody in a meeting saying: wouldn't it be neat if we were to say it this way or believe this way or do this way? And he wants to borrow from this religion and that religion and- and say, again, like Ian the Integrationist does: the Scriptures are good but look at all these other experiences people are having. Wouldn't it be great? We all know that the Presbyterians don't like to experience things. They're numb. They sit still way too long. There's no hand waving, there's no jumping, there's no smoke machine. There's a screen but they don't even put it down. It's like Jesus doesn't trust us with technology. It's very simple, it's very plain, it's very... free. We're free, brothers and sisters, we're free from the constraints of men who would seek to impose on us all these things that THEY say are necessary for Christian experience and yet, when we look at the Bible- when we look at the Bible, what do we find? Empty talkers and deceivers must be silenced. Do not listen to these people. Open the Bible and say: where do you find that in God's Word? And remember, there's not always going to be one verse that says, "thou shalt: whatever the issue is," but good and necessary consequence from Scripture drives a large part of our understanding in our theology. The Scripture doesn't necessarily speak ABOUT everything but it does speak TO all things. The empty talkers and deceivers must be silenced.

Thirdly, the Judaizers must be silence- silenced. Now, nobody would have us go back to circumcision, at least I don't think so. That's the actual word here that's used in the- the Modern English Version. "The circumcision." You want to be known for something, I'm not sure circumcision would be what you would want to be known by. Not too many people here are trying to drag us back to Jerusalem, but there are, in our day and age, some who would have us look longingly at Rome. Some who might uphold the pomp and circumstance and smells and bells as if to say Jesus hath given these gifts to men, rather than understand that man tried to give these gifts to Jesus when the pure Gospel of Christ wasn't enough. Remember that- that purgatory, that idea that "I can do this, I can- I can pay for this MYSELF," that that's still the best idea we've come up with. So in this life, we always want to add what WE can do, what WE can celebrate, what WE can appropriate to make God even MORE pleased with us. But no, the Judaizers must be silenced. In a few weeks we'll read in Galatians 5 where Paul says-- and we heard him start to confront it today in our- in our New Testament reading-- he says, [vs 7-12] "You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little yeast leavens the whole batch. I have confidence in you through the Lord that you will not think otherwise. But he who is troubling you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is. Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense

of the cross has ceased. I wish"-- and listen to this. 'cause sometimes we say things in the church and people think "well that was kinda rude, you really should have found a nicer way to say that." And listen, the issue here is circumcision. And what does Paul say?-- "I wish that those who are troubling you would castrate themselves!" You want to take it off? Take it all off! If that's going to make you so holy. It should show the seriousness with which Paul takes these things when he says the Judaizers, those of the circumcision, must be silenced. Paul was hopeful for ca- castration in their cases.

Fourth, warped, subversive, power-wranglers must be silenced. Warped, subversive, power-wranglers must be silenced. "Who subvert whole houses by teaching for dishonest gain things they ought not teach." Now, some might see this as an extension of what happens when those of the circumcision were(?) coming in, but- but there is, linguistically, a little bit of a separation. The language here is: teaching what isn't necessary. And so it's imposing on people what they don't necessarily need to know or worry about. And why are these people doing it? They're doing it for power! The phrase here, "dishonest gain," is not necessarily a financial idea. Nowhere else here are finances mentioned. We- we have a short list and a long list of what an elder should be and do and we find finances nowhere there. It's not that finances aren't important but we have to-- when we get then to a phrase "dishonest gain" just say, "well, then that means the pastor can't drive a Bentley." There's more to it here than that. If you want to provide a Bentley, that's fine, but that's- that's not what he's talking about here, okay? There are lots of ways for warped, subversive, power-wranglers to gain power in the church. It might j- might just be simply weaseling in their own personality cult, shaming of those who aren't just like them, superiority of spirituality or of life, imposed standards (that was the issue of circumcision) that are not the Gospel, distortion of Scripture to find the true meaning. "Only *I* really understand what this text is talking about and saying." It introduces sometimes a form of gnosticism where only those who are in the club and have the jacket with their name on it get the true meaning of what's being said in a text. There are lots of ways that people gain power in the church that are separate from finances. Finance is one of them. Remember what Judas' role was among the apostles. Not-- Andrew, don't take this personally, I'm not saying that the- the treasurers are the Judas, but. But he- he grabbed on to those purse strings, didn't he, and remember those times: "Oh, I can't believe that she just poured out that perfume. How much better it would have been to sell that and to take the money and give it to"-- No! To take the money and put it in YOUR PURSE, Judas. So then YOU could control what happens with it. So yes, finances are- are a way that people can gain control in the church. But w- we need to be wary of all the OTHER ways that people start to carve out a sense of power and superiority in the church that does not belong to them. Remember what Paul is doing is pitting THESE guys against the ordained eldership of the church. And what CAN happen in a church is that somebody doesn't get their way, they don't get the office they want, they don't get the decision they want, and so they say, "fine, I'll do it my way." Brothers and sisters, the landscape is littered with those for whom one little issue was so important that they were willing to level an entire congregation to get their way. It's my way or obliteration. And yes, volume upon volume has been written of that happening to pastors. The testimony are as long as you can stand to sit and listen to, of pastors who crossed the wrong person and that person decided the pastor has to go. And they'll use whatever means they can to destroy the guy. But this is not just about pastors. Paul is pointing here to elders, but ultimately, it's not really even about elders. It's about elders protecting the flock from these kinds of people. And so any of us are vulnerable to that. So pray for your elders. Pray for your elders. Pray for your deacons as they work alongside the elders in the tangible, physical aspects of the ministry and our life together. Pray for us, that we would be faithful. Faithful to what?

Fifthly, we see the truth must be upheld. Pray that we would be faithful to the truth. Why? Because we will be sanctified by the truth. And what is the truth by which we will be sanctified? The Word of God! What then is the standard by which we measure all teaching; formal, informal, structured, casual

teaching in the church? The Word of God. That's why we confess together [WCF 1:9-10] "the infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one) must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of counsels, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." Brothers and sisters, this Book is our standard and if somebody is saying something that does not comport with God's Holy Word, Paul would say, and I echo with him, they must SHUT UP. Because they will destroy the peace and the unity and the purity of Christ's church. Brothers and sisters, as you look back through verses 5 through 9, an elder MUST BE and do THAT to shut the mouths of those who would harm the peace, unity, and purity of the church. In both obvious ways (blatant heresy, things that we would all say "well, that's so obviously wrong") but also in subtle ways, in the ways that will eat away at your soul, that will eat away at your peace in the body of Christ, the unity that we experience at Trinity, and the purity of Christ's church. It will erode it, it will seek to destroy it. That must not happen, their mouths must be shut.

Stand with me as we pray.