

Sermon Notes, Titus 1:10-16, Sunday 16th Nov 2025

We're becoming more and more aware of the dangers of fakes. Whether it's fake news, fake bank notes, fake holiday adverts, fake job listings, fake concert tickets, deep-fake videos or fake designer goods. The more valuable the real thing, the more likely it is that someone will try to make some money by creating a fake.

The most valuable commodity in the universe is not a thing but a person, the person of Jesus. And he's so valuable, that people try to make money by creating fakes.

The second half of Titus 1 contains instructions to Titus on how to deal with these fakes.

It makes it a slightly uncomfortable passage. We all prefer positive vibes to negativity. Confrontation and conflict is never pleasant. But good things are worth fighting for, so this is really important as we hold on to the precious gem that is Jesus.

Where do we fit into this?

Before we did into the details, we need to get clear how we fit into this passage. We aren't Titus.

Remember: This was written by the apostle Paul, one of the people who met the risen Jesus and had his authority to lay down the truth for the church down the ages. Paul had been on the island of Crete briefly. People had become Christians, churches had been started, and he left Titus behind to straighten things out. Lee explained last week, Titus is a bit like a bishop, tasked with appointing ministers across the island.

That's not us! But this letter is meant for us. 3:15 – the greeting is plural. This is a public letter, from Paul to Titus, but we're all meant to listen in. So Paul is communicating with us. The question is: What was he wanting to say to us by letting us listen in to his instruction to Titus?

I think there are three lessons for us, ordinary Christian people.

Fake Christianity is Empty

Paul's first move is to lay it on thickly that this fake Christianity is empty and worthless.

Just because this teaching is a fake, it doesn't mean it's unpopular. Far from it. Fake designer goods are popular precisely because they look like the real thing, but for a fraction of the price. People are falling for this stuff. "whole households" (verse 11). Don't think just because lots of people go to a particular church, buy a particular book, or attend a particular conference, that means it's healthy. It just means it's popular.

So he exposes the emptiness. Bursts the bubble.

1. Verse 11, "meaningless talk", literally empty. 2. "Deceptive" – sounds good, but doesn't deliver what it claims to. 3. Driven by what they get out of it, "for the sake

of dishonest gain" (11). They claim to be teaching something that benefits you. In fact, it doesn't deliver, but it benefits them – financially, reputation, opening other doors to influence. 4. Based on "myths" (14). Made up stuff. 5. "Human commands of those who reject the truth" (14). They may claim to be telling you God's ways, but this is just the invention of other human beings who don't care for what God says at all. 6. They are detestable. This is a really strong word. We tend to think people who distort Christian truth are nice people who are a bit misguided. The word means you find something absolutely revolting. I met one suggestion that the Greek word sounds like someone being sick, and that's where the word comes from. 7. Bracketing the whole description: They are disobedient. Two different words – "rebellious" (11), "disobedient" (16). Not willing to sit under anyone else's teaching, and have their views moulded by someone trustworthy.

Now: Not all these things will be true of every fake, but it's quite the picture. And there's a scale of how seriously something is wrong; and this is not describing every minor disagreement Christians have.

Also, I'd hate us to feel this lands on us just because we're still learning, and get many things wrong. Lee last week: John Calvin said shepherds need two voices, one to gather the sheep, one to scatter the wolves. We all have mixed up views on many things. That doesn't make us all worthless and detestable.

But we do need to be careful who influences us. If someone is trying to teach and steer us, and they're offering a different Jesus to the real one, we need to see through it.

Hans Christian Andersen, The Emperor's New Clothes. Nobody dared to call it out as fake. The apostle Paul is the child's voice calling out that this teaching has no clothes. He wants to break that bubble for us.

Fake Christianity is to be Eradicated

The real Jesus must shine, and that means the fakes must go.

Titus has a role, in his bishop-like function, and so does every church leader.

Titus's role comes in verse 13 (read 12-13).

The role of church leaders comes in verse 10, "for...". So Paul's thinking carries on from verse 9. Read verse 5 and verse 9, "for" (read verse 10).

Church leaders are to refute it. It's our job to open up the Bible, teach the truth, and clearly show where the wrong ideas go wrong.

People like Titus are given a stronger instruction. Not just "rebuke" but "sharply". There is to be no doubt that they've been told off. If false teaching is this serious, they're not to play games at shutting it down.

So the summary is in verse 11: "silenced, ... because ...". The damage is enormous. *Whole* households, but they're being *disrupted*. That is another really strong word. Literally, they're being tripped up, overturned. It's the same word as when Jesus turns over the tables in the temple (remember the story?). Whole families are being upended by this, tipped over. So this problem must be stopped as firmly as that.

But what for us? Remember this letter was not written *to* us. Paul tells Titus verse 13, “Rebuke them sharply”. It does not mean Paul is commanding *us* to rebuke such people. These are not instructions to us. Paul wants us to listen as he gives these instructions to Titus and to the church leaders. So why do we need to listen?

We need to grasp how serious this is; our pastors and bishops are instructed by God himself to shut this teaching down.

Again, I don’t want this to land on the wrong ears. Please don’t think that the only reason you’ve not been added to a particular team is because we think you’re a heretic.

But expect us to counter wrong ideas as well as teaching right ones. Teaching positively is always more popular, so it’s not easy to do, so pray for wisdom for us. The real Jesus is so beautiful and life-giving, and the alternatives are void of meaning and detestable. Expect it, and welcome it! If during a sermon we unpick something you’ve heard elsewhere, be thankful for that. Chat to us if that would help, and check it out.

In the old days, nobody travelled, so if you picked up some strange ideas we’d probably know who you got them from. It’s much harder today. We have YouTube! We don’t know who people are listening to. We’d love to serve you. Drop us a message about a new channel you’ve found and ask us if it looks healthy.

Fake Christian is External

(or, at least, it is in this case)

What was the exact error being taught on Crete? We know from verses 10 and 14 that the teaching has a flavour of Judaism from the old covenant. Things like the value of food laws and circumcision.

The biggest clue comes in verse 15. Mark 7:1-5, 14-23. These teachers were teaching that what you do on the outside can you make you acceptable to God. Paul puts the record straight. (Read verse 15): If you’re pure (on the inside), nothing you eat or do makes you impure. But if you’re corrupt on the inside (because you don’t believe), nothing you do is pure. You’re rotten to the core. Your mind is corrupt, so is your conscience.

So verse 16 follows: You are unfit for doing anything good.

Not all fakes of Christianity work this way, but many do. It doesn’t need to have a Jewish flavour. Lots of people think that Christianity is basically about doing good things. They could be religious like serving on lots of teams at church. They could be just good neighbourly things that are really good, everything volunteering for a local homeless charity to babysitting your neighbour’s XL Bully dog while they’re on holiday. Do enough of that, you’ll be OK.

Here’s the awful truth for the person who thinks they’ll be OK if they do enough good. Verse 16b. They’re unfit for doing anything good. It’s not just that they haven’t done enough. None of the things they’ve done actually count as being

good! “If I do enough good deeds, I’ll be in God’s good books. I’m aiming for 100 good deeds, what’s my score? Am I up to 30?” “Actually, you’re on zero”.

If your child gets chicken pox, what’s the cure? It’s a virus in their blood. Wait it out. Until the blood is healed, the spots won’t go. Covering the spots with foundation or plasters isn’t going to heal them. The problem is inside.

Here’s the beauty of the real Jesus that gets so hidden by this. He takes us, defiled and corrupt, and gives us new hearts. He gives us pure minds and clean consciences as a free gift. Then good works just flow like fruit on a healthy tree.

Conclusion

The real Jesus is glorious.

Sadly, there are many fakes around.

Paul has to instruct Titus how he and the church leaders should deal with this threat, but he wants us all in the room as he does it.

Let’s see the emptiness of it, so we aren’t seduced.

Expect us to be trying to eradicate it. Pray for wisdom for us as we do this, and let us serve you in this way.

Let’s not fall for a Christianity that just papers over the cracks.

Let’s hold firmly to the healthy message of the Jesus who died and rose again to give us a heart transplant, that transforms us to be like him in the most remarkable ways.