

Title: Pile on the Truth
Date: November 7, 2021
Subject: Thanksgiving Travels – response to the truth
Scripture: Titus 1:1, 5 – 16; 2:15; 3:9 - 11

Our two oldest granddaughters spent two nights with us early this week. One thing they like to do is watch Charlie Brown videos. The pine cone doesn't fall too far from the tree, now does it? Sophie even wore a Snoopy Christmas shirt and wanted me to put on my similar one. I popped in *Charlie Brown's Christmas Tales* and settled back to watch with the girls. At one point Lucy tells Linus he needs to buy a Christmas gift for her because it says so in the Bible. Linus is in a chair with a Bible. He responds that it doesn't. "You can't fool an Old Testament theologian." Linus frequently quotes Scripture. Lucy proceeds to get her own copy of the Bible. She excitedly comes back to Linus. "I found the word sister in the Bible. This proves you need to buy me a Christmas present." You can just imagine the response from Linus: "Good grief."

Lucy used one word to build her belief. She was quite wrong. She illustrates the prevalence of false teaching. We need to be like Linus, rooted in our understanding of truth.

Last week in our series *Thanksgiving Travels with Titus*, we focused on the foundational principle of what Jesus Christ has done in bringing salvation to people. He's the embodiment of God's grace, kindness and love.

A B. Simpson spoke of what the Savior accomplished through his death on the cross: "God is reconciled, justice is satisfied, sin has been atoned for, the judgment of the guilty may be revoked, the condemnation of the sinner canceled, the curse of the law blotted out, the gates of hell closed, the portals of heaven opened wide, the power of sin subdued, the guilty conscience healed, the broken heart comforted, the sorrow and misery of the fall undone."

What do we do?

I. Reaction to the truth READ 1:1

We need to know the truth. Paul states his mission as a servant and apostle was to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ so people could put their trust in Jesus and possess a knowledge of the truth. Truth is the whole body of teaching about Christ, the revelation about him as given in God's Word. Faith and knowledge rest on the foundation of the hope of eternal life.

Why would followers of Jesus need a good knowledge of the truth? The truth isn't out there. The truth is in here (hold up Bible). It's the voice of truth. It's God's gift to us. It's the Word of life. It's the record of divine love from God to people. It contains the map to heaven. It's life altering.

We need to hold firmly to the truth Read 1:5 - 9

Titus was assigned to Crete to finish what had been started. "Straighten out" is a medical term referring to setting broken bones or straightening out crooked ones. Apparently, some of the leaders were a little crooked,

like a bent piece of pipe that shouldn't be bent. And there were some places that lacked leaders. His task was to help the churches through appointing qualified leaders.

These verses give qualifications for men who are to serve as elders, overseers who are entrusted with God's work. It doesn't mean they're to be perfect as these traits are to be experienced by all maturing believers. Rather it's a picture of a person who is a serious disciple of Jesus and is interested in pursuing his faith. He has made substantial gains. There'll always be more ground to conquer as we won't be done with our spiritual growth until we reach heaven's shore. Each of these characteristics warrants study in itself but we don't have time at the moment. Instead, we'll pick out some that relate to this morning's topic.

Go to v. 9: "He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught." He is to have a pretty good knowledge of the teachings of and about Christ. He can't be a newbie who isn't aware of key teachings.

What does it mean for church leaders, and everyone, to hold firmly to the truth? Believe it's trustworthy, dependable and reliable. Understand there are forces that are going to try to alter the message about Jesus Christ. Some say truth is variable, even according to our emotions, the way we feel. It's up to each person to determine their own truth. Others hold culture decides what is true or the majority.

Norman Geisler, defender of the faith, developed an acrostic TRUE to "help you remember what is TRUE about truth: Transcendent: Truth comes from God, and he has revealed it to his creation. Take gravity, for example. Newton didn't determine gravity; he merely discovered its existence. In the same way, humans know truth because God reveals it in his creation and in his Word, the Bible. Real: Truth matches (corresponds to) the facts in the real world. Two opposing things can't be true at the same time and in the same sense. That would be a contradiction. Universal: Truth applies to all people, at all times, and in all locations. For example, $1 + 1 = 2$ is a universal truth that is not challenged or denied. Exclusive: Truth is absolute. Though opinions about truth change, truth, on the other hand, remains the truth and therefore cannot change. Beliefs change but not truth (The Bible's Answers to 100 of Life's Biggest Questions, pp. 15, 16. cdn.bakerpublishinggroup.com/processed/book-resources/files/Excerpt_9780801016943.pdf?1420817545).

II. Responsibility to and for the truth

This has to do with the way the truth is used. 1:9 reveals two purposes- "encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it." The idea is repeated in 2:15 - "encourage and rebuke."

A. Encourage.

The tool for encouraging is "sound doctrine." This means that it's healthful, it builds up our spiritual faith. It reminds people they're on the correct path. Soundness is emphasized in Titus – Read 1:13c, 2:1, 2, 8.

"You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (2:1). The Amplified Bible reads "teach what is fitting and becoming to sound (wholesome) doctrine [the character and right living that identify true Christians]." This command is followed by the command to teach older men to be sound in the faith and teach older women to teach what is good (2:2, 3). It's what is profitable as "All Scripture is God-breathed and is

useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16).

How do we make sure what is taught is sound? It needs to be thoroughly based on what the Bible says. It's not up to an individual's interpretation or view. We find this warning in another Scripture: “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (1 Peter:1:20, 21). There have been some tragic consequences when people elevate their own private interpretation. This is how the cults originated. Joseph Smith of the Mormons created his own version of spiritual truth.

Recently people have used the Bible to make bold pronouncements about what the Lord told them about the results of the election, winners of sports games, covid and much more. What did they have in common? They were wrong...wrong in doing so and wrong in application.

What happened next? Some concluded the Bible was in error, the Bible can't be trusted, the Bible let us down. Wrong, wrong and wrong. It isn't the Bible that's wrong. It's the false narrative put out by people who don't correctly handle the word of truth and mislead people.

We need to check Scripture with Scripture so that we don't take something out of context or take one verse as an overriding emphasis. It's a protective measure as people have latched onto one phrase of the Bible or one word or part of a doctrine and used it a way never intended by God. If they were to do due diligence, they'd find how it would fit into the entire Bible.

Additionally, we can check with others who have studied the Bible to make sure that we're on base.

B. What kind of approach do we take to truth? READ 2:7, 8.

First quality is integrity. It means to be faithful and true to what the Scripture says, to be pure in doctrine, to be genuine. It's to not make it say something it doesn't say. It's not to be molded into what the speaker wants. It's to be the plain unadulterated truth. There's no need to mix in anything else to make it more palatable to the listener. It's the idea of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Next up is seriousness. Often seen as dignity. It's the way God's holy Word is treated. Yes, there's room for humor as God shows his throughout Scripture, but we're to approach it with respect and earnestness. Don't treat the Bible as a joke.

Soundness of speech. What is said and the way it's said will be for the health of the presenter and the listeners. Some teachings may be pointed and direct but it's still with the intent of bringing health. Even as a doctor uses surgery to remove what is diseased in the desire to bring health.

These characteristics lead to what is said being unable to be condemned. Those who oppose Christ and his message can't find fault with what is said. They may mock it. They may belittle it. They may say it's false. But they really don't have any basis for their argument. They resort to attacks.

C. Transformation. The truth is given for transformation. Read 2:15. The “things that should be taught” references the impact of the gospel. The immediate effect is to godly living and saying “no” to ungodliness. It's all in the context of Jesus being the Savior, how he came to redeem us and create people who'd be eager to do what is good. Teaching is to be a reminder of how followers of Jesus Christ are to live. It's an outflow of having sound doctrine. It's like how a healthy lifestyle goes a long way in the prevention of physical disease. The same is true with sound doctrine. It goes a long way against prevention of spiritual disease. The truth has practical ramifications. As one person wrote: “The gospel offers not merely an escape from the punishment of sin but aims to affect a transformation in the character and conduct of the safe saved” (Everyman's Bible Commentary on Titus and Philemon, D. Edmond Hiebert, p. 58).

D. Refute.

REREAD 1:9, 2:15.

This was another element of Titus straightening out what was unfinished -- protecting against corrupting influences of false teachers. There was false teaching, mis-teaching and mis-living that needed to be corrected. They want to rip the “trustworthy message” of Jesus to shreds. It was time to go to combat stations.

Refuting “signifies a presentation of evidence so that the arguments of the opponents are beaten down and proved to be baseless” (Hiebert, p. 36).

READ 1:10 -16.

The first thing that needs to be done is to determine the identity of these people. They're rebellious. They don't submit to the divinely revealed truth of God's word which means they're rebelling against God. They're mere talkers indicating they spout a lot of words but there's isn't any substance to what they say. We can use the Greek word Adrian Rogers taught us - they spew bologna. They could create works of mental art, spin fanciful stories, but they're deceivers. They say things that are untrue attempting to move people from holding firmly on to the faith. They're of the circumcision group. They believe a person is only truly saved if they abide by the Jewish ceremonial laws, rituals, legends and traditions. They felt they had a higher knowledge but didn't. They taught things that shouldn't be taught. Their real purpose is they're out to make money and do so in a dishonest fashion. This is in contrast to 1:7 where an overseer is to not pursue dishonest gain.

Apparently, these people were on the inside of the church body, had some sort of affiliation with it. They claimed to know God but 1:16 says they deny him by their actions. It adds they're detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. It's possible they're also on the outside and attacking from that angle.

The result of their teaching is they ruin whole households. They don't build up. They tear down. They're spiritual home wreckers.

What must be done. 1:9 - refute those who oppose the trustworthy message. 1:11 - they must be silenced. The false and misleading need to be muzzled. They need to be told “not a word, not a single word.” They aren't to be given a platform to spout their point of view. Don't give them the opportunity to teach. And when they start to speak in error, stop them.

The listeners aren't exempt from being cautioned. 1:13 - rebuke them sharply. It's again the idea of a surgeon cutting away diseased flesh. Strong words. It's cutting away the openness to listen to false, rebuking people who should know better and should have their faith in the trustworthy message of Jesus but are leaning toward something else. They have itching ears. They need to have that part cut out, that they'll pay no attention to Jewish myths or the commands of those who reject the truth.

The purpose is for those who are in the church to be sound in the faith. One of the ways to do that is to use the truth on them.

We can add another layer. READ 3:9 - 11.

Avoid, as in avoid like the plague. Don't get close to it. Don't mess around with it. Don't toy with it. Don't see if there might possibly be some benefit from it. Just stay away from it. Don't go there.

What is the "it"? Foolish controversies, genealogies, arguments, and quarrels about the law. Foolish means silly or dumb and it doesn't add to spiritual wisdom. Controversies are the speculations of people. Genealogies refer to people using the records of the Old Testament saints and creating fictitious, fantastical stories based on them. The quarrels about the law are brought on by those who insist keeping the ceremonial law be used as a measuring tool for spiritual growth. Don't get involved with these. They aren't profitable. They don't help build people up in the faith or in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. They're useless, a waste of time and energy that could be devoted to a serious and sincere study of God's word. They're a distraction.

Seems like the source of these is from the inside the church body. The person is divisive. The NIV Study Bible has a note: "The Greek for this phrase became a technical term in the early church for a type of "heretic" who promoted dissension by propagating extreme views of legitimate Christian truths" (NIV Study Bible note on 3:10). They take a truth and run to an extreme position. They cause pain and suffering on the body of believers because they're dividing people.

We're further told they're warped, as in not true, like a piece of warped lumber that isn't helpful for constructing a wall. They're sinful as in exercising pride and conceit in their opinions. They're self-condemned. This doesn't mean they're going to hell. It does mean they're guilty of false teaching and they know better. Their immaturity is showing.

We're to warn the divisive person, then warn a second time and after that have nothing to do with the person. It's the idea of shunning. Turn away from them.

The purpose, though not stated, is the same as we found in 1:13 -- that they would be sound in the faith. Hopefully, they'll come to their senses and return to the trustworthy message and desire to be brought back into complete fellowship with the body of believers.

The trustworthy message, the truth, being sound in the faith begins with this: "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:4, 5).