

**Truth Matters**  
(Titus 1:10-16)

This is some of the candy left over at our house on Halloween which I brought to the office to help our staff grow in their ability to resist temptation. Suppose I asked you to guess how many pieces of candy were in this bag. Is there a right answer? Sure. There are a definite number of pieces of candy here and your guess is either right or wrong because that is a question of fact. But what if I asked you, "What's the best candy in this bag?" – is there a right answer to that question? No, that's a question of preference. Some people like Milky Way, others like Candy Corn while others like Kit Kat bars. Facts are binding on everyone. There are a definite number of pieces of candy in this bag. Preferences, or likes and dislikes on the other hand, are personal. Your preferences may be different than mine but they are right for you just like mine are right for me. What our culture has done is to move much of personal morality out of the arena of facts and into the arena of preferences. You believe you should be faithful to your spouse; your neighbor doesn't. The culture says you just have different values; different preferences which makes morality as personal as your taste in candy. You have your morality, I have mine. Don't push your morality on me and I won't push mine on you because it's all a matter of personal preference. Does that sound familiar? It's moral relativism; meaning there are no absolute rights and wrongs, only what you determine for yourself. But moral relativism ignores the fact that moral behavior has real effects on people and on society; and those effects or facts can be observed and smart people will pay attention. There was a shameful time in our nation's history when most people in America believed that slavery was a matter of personal preference. Some people were comfortable having slaves; others were not. But over time people began to notice that slavery harmed both the slaves and the slaveholders and the abolitionist movement was born; because the facts proved that slavery was wrong. When I was younger, open marriage was all the rage. Therapists encouraged people to have affairs to help their marriages. They claimed that if a husband and wife slept with other people, it would invigorate their marriage and make them appreciate each other more. Of course, it turned out they were wrong. Affairs didn't strengthen marriages, they destroyed marriages and eventually the therapists apologized, "I guess our theory was wrong." But that didn't help the folks whose lives were shattered because they believed them. Ideas have consequences. Moral choices affect our lives and the lives of others and that places those choices must be in the category of truth or error; and not in the area of mere likes and dislikes. The quality of our life and the impact our life has on others depends upon us living in reality and that is why the Bible consistently emphasizes our need to discern truth from error. And why Paul goes to war against the false teachers in Crete in his letter to Titus. This morning I want to talk about how to recognize truth. Now I'm making some big assumptions. I'm assuming there is such a thing as truth with a capital T; a reality which binds us all. And I am assuming that we can know this truth. So in a culture of competing truth claims, ideas and philosophies, how can I possibly know what is true? This morning as we look at vs. 10-16 of Titus 1 I want to look at three tests for truth. Three ways to tell if a claim to truth – especially a claim to religious or spiritual truth – is valid. First, what is the origin? What is this truth claim based upon? Second, what is the focus? Does this claim to truth deal with the fundamental questions of life or does it ignore them? Third, what is the effect? How do people behave who embrace this truth? Paul wrote this letter to Titus shortly after the two men had planted a bunch of new churches on the island of Crete. These infant churches are struggling because of the culture of Crete and Paul leaves Titus behind on the island to get these young congregations to the place where they can not only survive but grow. And the first responsibility Paul gives Titus is to appoint the right leaders for these young churches because of the false teaching that had already crept into these congregations. In Paul's letter to Titus, he talks about how believing the gospel leads inevitably to doing good; so it should come as no surprise that Paul would see false teaching and lies as the greatest threat to the infant churches on the island of Crete.

Let's look at the first test of truth. What is the origin? Where did it come from? Christianity believes in revealed truth. How do I know if what I believe is objectively true or I am being shaped by my culture, my feelings or my own subjective preferences? The only way we can know what is true is if God reveals that truth to us and we

believe that God has revealed Himself in history and ultimately through His Son and that revelation is contained in the Scriptures. Therefore, the first test of any truth claim is "Is it biblical?" The Bible is the source of truth and the standard for truth. That's why Jesus always referred to the Scriptures in every argument. I counted Jesus saying "It is written." or "Have you not read?" almost 60 times in the Gospels. That's why Jesus criticized the religious leaders of His time for choosing the words of men over the word of God. And that is why for Christians down through the centuries, the most important question has been "Where is it written?" because the Bible is our starting point for all truth claims. The Bible does not contain all truth but all that it does contain is true and therefore is the standard for all other claims to truth. That's why Paul's first problem with the false teachers is the fact they are teaching the ideas of men rather than the Word of God. Let's read vs. 10-14. Paul is explaining to Titus why the first thing Titus needs to do is to get leaders into every church in Crete who not only hold fast the word of God in their own lives but are able to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict. *"For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole households, teaching things they should not {teach} for the sake of sordid gain.* The households probably refer to the house churches of Crete which have been invaded by those claiming to be Christians but who teach error rather than the truth – as they still do today. So how do we recognize a false teacher? Paul gives us a pretty comprehensive portrait. First, they are rebellious; literally insubordinate, meaning rebellious to the authority of the Scriptures. They refuse to put themselves under the authority of the Word of God. Now in the church they are smart enough not to do this openly. They usually don't say, "The Bible is wrong about this." Most of the time, they claim to have an insight that every other Christian has missed; something past generations of Christians didn't know. "Christians in the past were shaped by their culture but we know now how this verse really doesn't mean what it seems to say and we need to come out of the dark ages and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century or into the first century in the case of Crete. False teachers are rebels. They don't follow in the line of other people who have believed the Bible because they really don't believe it. They're rebels. Second, people often like listening to them. Paul calls them "empty talkers." They're talking but saying nothing of value. I've noticed that people listen to the false teachers today more because of how they say something rather than what they actually say. "He's so funny or he tells such great stories or he's so positive, always smiling or he makes me feel good about myself." It's never, "He tells me the truth about Jesus and about God." Third, they are deceivers, phonies, con men – not what they appear to be. I'm not going to name names but we've seen a ton of these phony teachers who initially look so good and so godly and attract huge followings until God reveals their hypocrisy and errors. Jesus called them wolves in sheep's clothing. They only look like sheep. The longer you're around them, the better the chance you'll get bitten. Now in the case of Crete, many of these false teachers were from what Paul refers to the circumcision. This means they were not only from Jewish backgrounds as both Paul and many of the first century believers were but that they continued to insist that non-Jews could not be saved unless they were first circumcised and converted to Judaism; that what Jesus accomplished at the cross was not sufficient to save us; that we also have to keep the law of Moses to be saved. This was the first big battle in the early church; would the church become just a Jewish sect or something altogether new? And we see this battle being waged in a number of the letters of the New Testament as well as in the Acts of the Apostles. So many of these false teachers were legalists; trying to add requirements to salvation which the gospel tells us is based completely upon Christ's completed work in our behalf. Legalism – extra things you must do to be saved – almost always characterizes false teaching. False teachers always focus on what we must do rather than upon what Christ has done. Next notice the motivation of these false teachers. More times than not, it is financial. Paul says these teachers must be silenced which will be done by qualified leaders who refute their teaching from the Scriptures because they are upsetting entire churches as they teach for sordid gain. How many times have we seen this in our own age; phony pastors and leaders who grow wealthy as they teach God's people heresy? They are not motivated by a love for the truth but by the love of money.

After describing these guys, Paul gives Titus one example of the false teachers flooding the house churches of Crete. *"One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true.*" What testimony is true? That these false teachers are stereotyping all Cretans as liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons or that Cretans are liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons? I found this a confusing verse, especially since most commentaries suggest that Paul is quoting a Cretan philosopher named Epimenides who was one of the most famous Cretans of all history; a poet, teacher; and one of the great heroes of Crete who wrote a poem about his own people which obviously wasn't included on their travel brochures. Epimenides said "Cretans

are liars” and they were known as such throughout the Greek world, especially because they claimed that the tomb of Zeus was on Crete. Well, everybody knew that Zeus was the king of the gods and couldn’t die and so the Cretan’s claim to have his tomb was a lie. In fact, as Jeff pointed out a couple of weeks ago, the Greek word “to lie” is literally “to cretanize.” Crete was famous for its liars, cheaters, criminals and gluttons and so many people interpret Paul to be saying that these false teachers are typical Cretans. “This testimony is true.” Epimenides was right. However, I see this slightly differently. Paul isn’t criticizing Cretans here, he is criticizing false teachers and one in particular who proclaims this stereotype of Cretans as the word of God which Paul uses as an example of how conformed to their culture these false teachers are. They’re not teaching the word of God; they’re simply parroting what the culture already believes. If the Bible is universally true, then it will always be countercultural. It will always conflict with what the culture is telling us and so if any teacher is in step with his culture at every point, then he is a false teacher and I think that’s Paul’s point here.

*“For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.”* Paul tells Titus that the young believers of Crete who are being upset by these false teachers need to be warned and corrected strongly and directly so that they can be sound in faith and stop paying attention to myths and commandments of men rather than to the word of God. That’s why the first test of truth is what is the origin? Where did it come from? Is it from the Bible or from somewhere else? This test runs throughout chapter 1. In vs. 3 Paul says he was entrusted with God’s word “according to the commandment of God our Savior” which he contrasts with “the commandments of men” in vs. 14. In vs. 1 Paul writes of the “truth that leads to godliness” as contrasted with those who reject the truth in vs. 14. In vs. 2 Paul writes of “God who does not lie” as contrasted with the rebellious men who are empty talkers and deceivers in vs. 10. In vs. 9, elders are to hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, to that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict,” which Paul contrasts with vs. 14 and “paying attention to Jewish myths and the commandments of men who turn away from the truth.” The first test of truth is where does it come from? Is it based upon myths and the commandments of men or upon the word of God?

The greatest challenge to the churches in Crete was whether believers would listen to the words of men or to the Word of God; and that has always been the greatest challenge to the church. Will the church be shaped by the word or by the culture? That was the reason for the great Councils of the early church as church leaders had to decide what the Bible actually taught as they faced legalism, Gnosticism, Arianism and host of other man-made doctrines inspired by the various cultures in which the church found itself. That was the reason for the Reformation as the Reformers chose to listen to the Scriptures than to the historic doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. This is how our own Covenant denomination was born. In the 1800s in Sweden, everyone was a member of the Swedish Lutheran Church but the faith was dead. Small groups of believers began meeting in illegal Covenant groups just to read the Bible together and soon they began asking the question, “Where is it written?” testing everything they had been taught by the Church against the Scriptures. As a result, people began to be born again to a living faith in a risen Savior rather than a dead faith in man-made doctrines. And to whom we will listen is still the greatest challenge to the church. Every problem in the American church is a reflection of American culture and the power of that culture to shape Christians unless they are shaped by the Bible; whether it be consumerism or the prosperity gospel or emotionalism or individualism or adopting the sexual ethnics of our culture over the orthodox ethics of the historic church. We are in the same battle the churches of Crete were in, the Battle for the Bible. Nobody is trying to take our Bible away but we are tempted daily to ignore it. Nothing has changed my life or blessed my life more than this book. The more I read it, the more convinced I am that only God could have behind its creation. It shows me the truth about myself and about life like no other book. When I do what it says, the things the Bible promises will happen always happen. When I heed its warnings, I am protected from things that would destroy me. When I trust its promises, God always fulfills them. The first test for truth is where is it written but if we are not familiar with the Bible, we won’t be able to tell the difference between truth and error; and as Paul says in Titus 1, that will be fatal. That is why at Creekside, we will never stop nagging you to read your Bible, to study your Bible and to apply your Bible daily. It is the only way to grow in your experience of Jesus and in becoming like Him. As Jesus said, “Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

The first test for truth is what is the origin? Is it from God or man? But as you all know, people can make errors when they think they are relying on the Bible. And so the second test for truth we can see in this passage is "What is the focus? What is important?" Even though we're coming to the Bible, if we don't interpret the parts of the Bible in light of the whole Bible, we'll miss the truth. There are a lot of cults which appeal to the Bible for their authority. They just don't appeal to the whole Bible. And they don't read the Bible the way the original writers read the Bible. Let's look at vs. 15. *"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."* Remember, Paul is talking about false teachers, people who are shaped by the commandments of men and myths rather than by the word of God. So what does vs. 15 have to do with these false teachers? It has to do with what they taught about purity; about how we separate ourselves from sin. Paul has referred to the circumcision, to those who pay attention to Jewish myths and the commandments of men; to the legalists who had invaded the first century churches; and so he is referring to what they taught as the road to purity. How do you keep from sinning? They said by staying away from anything that can make you impure. The false teachers taught that sin came from outside of us but Paul says it comes from the inside. *"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."* The problem isn't things; the problem is us. Sex and food are not sinful, we make them sinful when we use them in sinful and selfish ways. Sex or food don't corrupt us, we corrupt them. The focus of the false teachers was on externals; the focus of the gospel is on the internal. The battle Paul was having on Crete is the same battle Jesus fought with the Pharisees. The Pharisee were the religious conservatives of Jesus' day, the Bible people who claimed to believe the Bible but just didn't read it very carefully. The word Pharisee means separated one because the Pharisees believed that sin came from the outside and so they tried to separate themselves from everything that would make them sinful. There was even a group called the Bleeding Pharisees who would close their eyes every time they saw a woman on the street so the woman couldn't make them sin. With their eyes shut most of the time, they were constantly running into things and wore their scrapes and bruises as badges of righteousness. Anyway, the Pharisees complained to Jesus that His disciples hadn't washed their hands properly before they ate and were bringing corruption into their bodies. Jesus replies that this is just another example of the Pharisees following the commands of men and ignoring the commands of God - just like the false teachers of Crete. Then Jesus turns to the crowd. *"Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man."* (Mark 7:14-15) The Pharisees attacked Jesus' disciples for eating with dirty hands - as if that would defile them before God - but Jesus explains where true defilement before God comes from; not from without but from within. All sin comes from inside of us: our heart is a sin factory, constantly producing all manner of evil. Jesus accurately points out our true problem and it is a problem that religion is incapable of solving. All religion can affect is the externals. Only the gospel can change what I am inside. This is the same issue Paul is dealing with in Crete. The false teachers - like the Pharisees taught that purity is simply a matter of not doing things; not going to certain movies or watching certain shows or listening to certain songs or eating certain foods. And lots of religious people deprive themselves of things in an effort to be holy. Jesus' point is that their focus is wrong. Their problem isn't what goes in, it's what comes out. Unless you change the heart and mind and conscience, you haven't solved the problem of sin. That's why Jesus said *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they 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) I remember when I went through my Pharisee phase as a young Christian - stopped watching TV, listening to secular music, reading newspapers and magazines, going to movies; and avoided any more contact with the culture than was absolutely necessary - all in an effort to avoid the corrupting influence of that culture. And I was pretty proud of myself and pretty condemning of all the other worldly Christians. Yet in spite of doing everything I could to avoid the contamination of secular society, I continued to sin and to have a proud, uncaring heart toward people. I discovered that my best efforts to escape sin were not only futile but actually made me a worse sinner - because they didn't change my heart, the source of my problems. That's why Jesus says in Mark 7:21-23, *"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting {and} wickedness, {as well} {as} deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride {and} foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."* And why Paul says in Titus 1:15, *"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."* Real purity is from the inside out, not from the outside in and that is the focus of the gospel. That's why rules and laws can save no one. We need a new heart. We need to be cleansed from the

inside and that is what happens when we put our faith in Christ as Savior and He comes into our life and we are born again and given a new heart with God's laws written on them; and that is the focus of the Bible. Jesus said the whole Bible was about Him from beginning to end. He is the hero of the story and what He does for us is the focus of Scripture; and if we miss that, we will never interpret the Bible correctly. Any time we read the Bible, ask yourself these four questions to make sure you focus on the right things: 1. What am I supposed to do? 2. Why is it impossible for me to do it? 3. How did Jesus do it for me? 4. How does Jesus do it through me now? The Bible always moves from inside to outside, never from outside to inside. God changes us by His grace through Christ living in us; and then we respond in obedience in faith that Christ will give us the ability to live as He lived so that we can be blessed.

Now, because only Christ and the gospel solve the fundamental problem of our wicked heart, the last test of truth we see in this passage is what is the result? Does this truth actually change behavior? Look at vs. 16. *"They profess to know God, (the false teachers claimed to be speaking for God with their myths and man-made commands) but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed."* (Tit 1:10-16) Because their teaching can't change their hearts – Paul just told us that their mind and their conscience are defiled – it can't change their behavior. Even though they claim to have a relationship with God, they deny that relationship by their behavior. One of the consistent themes of Scripture is that it is impossible to really know the true God and to remain the same person. And while everybody sins, if someone claims to have a relationship with the holy, loving God of the Bible; and yet continues to live an unholy and unloving life, they're a liar. James writes, *"Faith without works is dead."* John writes, *"No one who practices sin has seen Him or knows Him."* Jesus says, *"Depart from Me, all you who practice lawlessness. I never knew You."* Our behavior reveals our true theology. True faith and knowledge of God leads to holy and obedient conduct and good deeds; a theme Paul will develop throughout this letter. So a third test of truth is what results from believing a particular truth? Does it make me more loving or less? - more open and welcoming to people or more closed and judgmental? - holier or more sinful? - more in love with Jesus or more in love with myself? - more trusting and relaxed or more anxious and tense? - in short, a better person or a worse person? In the Bible, all righteous behavior is the result of knowing and believing the truth and all unrighteous behavior is the result of believing what is not true. That's Paul's argument in vs. 16. Look at the way these guys live. How can you believe what they say? Back in the 80's English historian, Paul Johnson wrote a book called *Intellectuals* about the personal lives of those thinkers who have impacted modern culture – Rousseau, Shelley, Marx, Tolstoy, Russell, Sartre etc. Johnson's aim was to show how these philosophers' ideas impacted their own lives and what despicable characters they became; which makes their philosophies much less attractive when you see them lived out. Paul does the same thing in vs. 16. Truth does not exist in a vacuum. Ideas have consequences. We live the way we live because we think the way we think. So Paul asks, as you look at these teachers, are they the kind of people you want to become? Then reject their lies. That's great advice for us today, whether we're talking about pastors or authors, cultural leaders or politicians, professors or philosophers, entertainers or athletes – before you believe what they say, look at their life. Would you pattern your life after theirs? Then don't pattern your thought after theirs.

That is why I follow Jesus. If there is such a thing as truth, then Jesus is that truth. He alone is completely reliable and trustworthy, the only one I can trust fully and the only one I want to be like. Why? If God became a man, then that man would be Jesus. Others have said this is the truth but Jesus said I am the truth and backed up that claim by doing things only God could do, by living the only sinless life in history, by perfectly embodying every noble human ideal, by willingly sacrificing Himself on the cross for us and by then rising from the dead, never to die again.