

Xplore False Teachers

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Date: 22 February 2004

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 22nd of February 2004.

The preacher is Paul Barker. His sermon is entitled Explore False Teachers and is based on Titus chapter 1 verse 10 through to chapter 2 verse 1.

Well, let's pray that God will teach us and not only teach our minds, but change our lives as a result of these words. Heavenly Father, you've entrusted your word of truth to faithful teachers.

I pray that you'll make me faithful, that not only will you teach us in our minds, but transform our lives so that we may be fit for every good work.

And we pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen. The other day when my house cleaner was around, she was recommending to me an Indian guru called Sai Baba, whose name I'd heard, but I know little more and not particularly interested in finding out much more, to be honest.

[1 : 18] But she was telling me what a good man he was and that he's helped so many people. And I think she was saying that she's even made a pilgrimage to his ashram or whatever you call it in India, a sort of spiritual haven for finding purity in yourself and so on.

And the crowds who flocked to his ashram seemed to agree with her, I guess, that here is some great master who will provide an avenue for spiritual purity.

And she wanted me to agree with her, which I felt too ignorant about to do so. The quest for spiritual purity is one that many people pursue.

Many people want some form of spiritual purity. And it's a quest that runs deep inside many of us and it's a quest that is rising to the surface more and more, I think, in contemporary life and society.

More and more people are becoming more and more overt about seeking spiritual purity. And so there are those who go searching for spiritual purity in Eastern mysticism, the religions of the Eastern world, of the subcontinent and Asia, in finding it in spiritual purity, in meditation or from some particular guru or some yoga or physical sort of contortion type practice.

[2 : 48] There are those who find or claim you can find spiritual purity in different forms of religion. So in the monthly fast of Ramadan, for example, or in the pilgrimage to Mecca that so many people make and not all survive.

And there are those who search for spiritual purity by filling the air with incense, by following particular rituals or rites or chants or holiness groups or some form of thing like that.

Now, in Christian circles, the same quest for spiritual purity is around. It's not simply something that takes people away from Christian circles. The same quest applies within Christian circles.

And so there are plenty of people who, under the guise of Christian faith, seeking greater spiritual purity of some sort, fast and command others to fast, claim that we ought to be fasting for particular lengths of time, overnight fast monthly and stuff like that, or that we should have various rituals or forms of rites, or that perhaps some form of teze or other type chant will take us down a deeper path of spiritual purity.

Or all sorts of other religious rules that they or their churches or their groups seem to claim has helped them to find greater spiritual purity. There's a group that was part of both, I think, Anglican churches and some Presbyterian churches in Melbourne in the last perhaps 20 years or so, maybe a bit longer even, called the Fellowship.

[4 : 30] A group that claimed, in effect, greater spiritual purity. They formed a holiness sort of group. They were exclusive. They commanded people not to marry outside certain circles.

They cut off members of the family, of their families, if they were not part of that circle. And I know a number of people from this church and other places who've been, in a sense, victims of that group, of a pursuit of spiritual purity that has divided families, that has harmed people, but has had rules and regulations which they say have claimed a greater stage of holiness or purity for themselves.

Well, we're like the ancient world. There's not much that's new in all of this. In the ancient world, the same quest for spiritual purity was there. And so in ours.

And perhaps like the ancient world, certainly in today's society, there's actually very little critique of those sorts of quests for spiritual purity. Because the slogan of our day, in this area, at least, is if it works for you, then do it.

It's okay. So if sort of some contortionist yoga works for you, great. If some incense-filled building works for you, great. If some holiness group works for you, great.

[5 : 50] If some Eastern mysticism coupled with some form of Christian practice works for you, then pick and mix. Choose what you like. Change your mind. A bit of this now and a bit of that later.

So long as it works for you, that's fine. Because there is so little critique going on about these various quests for spiritual purity. And even in Christian circles, sadly, that's the case.

In Christian circles, there's such diversity as people head off in all sorts of different directions to find some form of spiritual purity or holiness. And maybe we're too polite or maybe we're too insecure or too ignorant to critique the various parts too often.

And so what we find, not only in our society at large, but all too often in our churches, is like a Sunday smorgasbord, although it's not lunchtime, it's usually the morning or the evening. Pick and mix.

Here's the buffet. Pick up your plate, dabble here and dabble there. A little bit of this and a little bit of that. What do you feel like today? It might be different from last week, but that doesn't matter. If it works for you, if it tickles your taste buds, then go for it.

[6 : 55] A spiritual Sunday smorgasbord. So often in our churches, something old and something new. And all the while, idle talkers talk, deceivers deceive, largely without restraint, in the consumerist pulpits of our city.

The striking thing about a passage in Titus today is not that there are idle talkers. It is not that there are deceivers. It is not that there are people beavering off into different paths of spiritual purity.

It is not that there are rebellious people who refuse to heed the teaching of St Paul and the New Testament and the Bible as a whole. The striking thing about a passage in Titus is when Paul says they must be silenced.

For who in our day and age would ever say something so harsh or dogmatic as that? He's a fundamentalist, so shove him up on the side is what our society would say to that sort of view.

Paul says at the beginning of verse 11 they must be silenced. That is, not pull a gun on them but to be silenced literally is to muzzle them, to stop their mouth opening, to stop them speaking, to shut them up, put a sock in it.

[8 : 16] That's the sort of idea here. Shut them up, Paul is saying, so that these idle talkers and deceivers, as he describes them in verse 10, so they shut up.

So they stop prattling on and stop speaking the things that they're speaking about. Well that sentence at the beginning of verse 11, they must be silenced, strikes me as being most counter-cultural of our day and age.

But you see, what Paul recognises, what the New Testament recognises, what in fact the whole Bible recognises from beginning to end, is that the gospel of Jesus Christ, that the Bible is on about, is not just one plate, or one course, in some form of spiritual smorgasbord, that we can pick and mix from.

The gospel of Jesus Christ, is a life and death issue. It's not that you can walk along a spiritual banquet, and take a bit of anything, and it'll all sort of, you know, tickle your taste bud, and it'll be okay.

The case is, that there is only one dish, in this spiritual range, that is not poisonous. And it is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because the gospel of Jesus Christ, is a life and death issue.

[9 : 28] As we heard from the very first two verses, of this passage, it is the knowledge of the truth, of the gospel of Christ, that conveys the hope of eternal life. That is, eternal life, only ever is realised, through the truth of the gospel, of Jesus Christ.

No other way, leads to eternal life. And the Bible is absolutely clear, on that, from beginning to end. And any other alleged truth, by some form of idle talker, or deceiver, is actually in the end, leading people to hell, and not to some spiritual purity, as they might allege.

So then, we must be careful. This is not an obvious issue. It is not black and white. It is not the case that, here you get things that talk about Jesus, and here you get the rest, and it's obvious, and we shun that, and we hold on to what talks about Jesus.

Not at all. It is nowhere near that simple. Because the false teachers, as they're described in verse 10, are deceivers. That is, they sound plausible, feasible, or rational.

They sound truthful. They might use the sorts of words, we might expect teachers to say. They might speak about Jesus Christ.

[10 : 54] They might call themselves Christian. They might speak in a Christian church, or even in a mainstream denomination, of Christianity. But they're deceivers, and therefore, we need discernment.

It's not black and white, and it's not obvious. We need to be wise, discerning, as we hear people speak, about spiritual matters, and the quest for spiritual purity.

Deception requires discernment, from the ears of the listeners. Because not everyone who talks about Jesus, is speaking the truth. You see, these idle talkers, these deceivers, more often than not, they're actually very good with words.

They're full of smooth words, that ooze out their mouth like honey, and they seem attractive, and sticky, and attract us. They're words that might well flatter us, but they deceive us into their snare, and into their lies.

Full of words. Full of words that might sound plausible, might sound reasonable, attractive, flattering, sweet as honey, but in the end, venomous, lethal, and deadly words.

[12 : 13] That's why Paul says, they must be silenced. Because they're so dangerous. Because deception leads to hell.

And so they must be silenced. Now, Paul gives, firstly, a couple of further reasons why they should be silenced. In verse 11, they're upsetting whole families, he says, firstly.

The word upset can be a bit weak. You know, as though we can get upset over spilt milk, as though it might be just a trivial thing. Oh, it sort of upset us a little bit tonight. It sort of disturbed our little peace.

Now, the word's stronger than that. It's got the connotation of ruining, dividing, irreparably, families. Now, lots of religious teaching divides families.

And maybe not just false teaching either. My family was very hostile to my Christian faith when I was at university. I used to get letters from family, from parents, saying that they were wishing that I was living back at home, that they were wishing that I was not so actively involved in Bible study and all this religious, what was the word, fervency and zeal.

[13 : 29] And then when I told them I was going to become an Anglican minister, it was one of the worst days of my whole life. As they sought through all sorts of manipulation to try and prevent me from becoming a minister.

Religion divides people and families very often. Thankfully, to God, since that day my mother's become a Christian, not yet my father.

Is Paul here saying that anything that divides families is wrong? That unity of families must be a top priority? And so these teachers must be silenced because they've upset families.

And that's the criteria. If you upset a family, they must shut up the preacher. Now, that's not what is behind what Paul is saying here. Very often, false teachers deliberately seek to divide families, to set husbands against wives or parents against children or brothers against sisters.

very often, very often, they try to coax a person into their holy huddle and to cut off all acknowledgement or contact or relationship with people outside the holy huddle, even if they're close members of families.

[14 : 42] Some of you here, I know, are victims of that and I've seen it from others who are friends of mine. Christianity promotes families and it calls us to love our parents and our siblings and our families even if they're not Christians.

There's nothing in the Bible that seeks to divide families actively, though there is an acknowledgement that sometimes unbelievers may walk away from believers within the same family.

So that's the first thing. And it may well be part of their teaching is deliberately trying to undermine Christian families. to rend them apart so it might win one person from a family to their holy huddle and the rest are destroyed in their faith anyway.

Part of perhaps what they're teaching might actually be about limiting marriage to particular people or particular heritage and therefore seeking to divide couples. The second thing that Paul speaks against these teachers also in verse 11 is that their motivation is greed.

They are teaching for sordid gain he says what it is not right to teach. That is their motive is not pure. Their motive is personal greed. They are getting paid to teach and they are teaching in such a way that they will manipulate and gain more money, more income, more pay from those who hear.

[16 : 10] Greek philosophers would often charge for their lectures. It's no different from our day and age. People charge exorbitant amounts if you read in the age in the newspapers and so on public lectures of this guru or that guru coming around.

There are people who make a lot of money out of peddling religion even in our day and age. It was true in Paul's day as well. The Rajneesh who was the head of those orange people in the 70s and 80s didn't he die leaving behind something like 86 Rolls Royces or something like that?

Well that's greed for gain surely if anything is. And of course the same applies sadly within so-called Christian circles. Some of the famous preachers who've made millions out of being preachers of the so-called gospel of Jesus and often cloaked under preaching the prosperity gospel that's untrue anyway.

Remember that Paul's instructions we saw last week one of the qualifications for being an elder or a bishop a teacher in the church of God is that that person must not be greedy for gain.

These false teachers are and they're deceivers. They're making money from people who've fallen for their snare. Don't be fooled by greedy preachers who usually if not always don't preach the truth.

[17 : 35] Well remember that Paul is writing to one of his protégés called Titus who's on the island in the Mediterranean called Crete Paul had left him there particularly to deal with these problems in the church in Crete but Crete had a reputation not a good reputation just like sometimes these days we might talk about the whinging poms as though English people have some form of reputation for whinging I'm not sure that they're any more whingers than we are the people of Crete had a reputation for lying and cheating so much so that in the Greek language a word was invented to lie or to cheat was Cretidzo from the word Crete the name of the island that's their reputation and one of their own teachers or prophets as it's called here a man called Epimenides about 600 years before Paul long time earlier had actually said Cretins are always liars vicious brutes and lazy gluttons that's not a nice thing to say about your own people well it's quite a philosophical debate if Epimenides was himself a Cretan and he said that

Cretins are always liars well what's actually the truth but that's another matter Paul actually agrees with him he says at the beginning of verse 13 that testimony is true that is the reputation that Crete has for being liars is a true reputation and it's evidenced by these deceivers these idle talkers who speak untruth they're lying as they propagate what looks to be truth but it is not in fact the truth so Paul is acknowledging to Titus that it's not simply a matter of false teachers but it's false teachers in a culture in which lying and falsehood was almost an acceptable part of life and so what Paul is saying in effect here is that the truth of the gospel clashes against the culture of the people of Crete the gospel always clashes against culture there's all sorts of stuff in our own culture that we're usually too blind to see that the gospel clashes against often if we go to some other culture or for those of you who've come from other cultures into

Australian culture can see more clearly how our cultural mores actually somehow condition what we believe about Christianity or how we practice it often we need to be sharper and shrewder and wiser than we are about where the gospel clashes with our own culture and that's why Paul says in verse 13 for this reason that is because Cretans are liars and here are false teachers who look to be acceptable because they're actually lying because of that culture therefore you must rebuke them sharply he says in verse 13 that is there's a very strong sense of urgency about that rebuke them sharply particularly directly is what he's saying here not some sort of mild rebuke you need strong rebuke because of the teachers and the culture in which they're operating now remember that rebuke is also one of the things that a true elder or bishop leader teacher in the church of

God has to do if you remember the last verse from last week's passage verse 9 the elder bishop must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to rebuke or refute those who contradict it same idea same word and notice that the rebuking comes from having a hold a firm hold on the word of truth the gospel the bible as we have it that is understanding and holding fast to the truth of the scriptures gives us the grounds for being able to rebuke anything that is taught or practiced contradictory to what is true in the scriptures titus is to model what an elder bishop is meant to do as we saw last week note too we often cringe at the word rebuke we don't like rebukes we don't like giving them we don't like receiving them but rebuke is not to condemn

Paul is not saying titus you've got to condemn these people when you silence them notice because you've got to rebuke them sharply so that they may become sound in the faith is how verse 13 ends not rebuke them sharply so that they're silenced and they're excommunicated but silence them rebuke them so that they get corrected they become sound or healthy in their faith so a rebuke is a loving thing to do for the sake of the teachers and for the sake of the listeners we rebuke with love as Christians it is hard to rebuke but for the sake of the person who is falling into falsehood or propagating it rebuke we must with a firm hold of the scriptures so that we're clear that we're rebuking correctly but full of love because the object of rebuking someone is to restore them to sound faith in the truth of the gospel well in the last couple of verses we actually get a bit more of a glimpse of what is being taught falsely in the church in Crete and in particular in this situation it seems to be that the church like so many instances in the New Testament is divided on the issue of what

[23 : 13] Jewish practices ought to be kept by Jews who become Christians now for many of us it's not an issue in our church life today most of us are Gentiles non-Jewish by race but in the first generation of the early church the church that had come through the gospel of Jesus Christ preached by the apostles had come out of a Jewish environment and a Jewish Old Testament and so in the first generation in particular these were very keen issues but as I suggested in the opening sort of a survey if you like of our day and age the principles that apply here apply to us today as well even if the precise preaching is different so verse 14 says that these people who are preaching falsehood the idle talkers and deceivers seem to be propagating Jewish myths and earlier on of course at the end of verse 10 he called them those of the circumcision a way of describing those who are preaching Jewish practices that they ought to be kept by calling it

Jewish myths in verse 14 Paul is not saying these are people who preach the Old Testament before you start silencing me as an Old Testament lecturer he's not talking about that he's talking about people who are promoting and propagating Jewish myths it might be distortions of the Old Testament or things that have been added to the Old Testament but it's not the truth of the Old Testament itself in particular it seems that these are people who are claiming that if you are to be a proper Christian you need not only to embrace faith in Christ but maintain various Jewish practices practices some of which you'll find in the Old Testament others which have been passed down by tradition for Jews in particular the issue is a purity issue what sorts of things do you need to be pure as a Christian faith in Christ but also possibly probably keeping allegiance to various Old Testament

Jewish food laws or other sorts of Jewish rituals or practices and quite possibly given the nature of dividing families whom you may or may not marry as well and maybe a whole range of other sorts of things in addition their teaching of Jewish myths that is things additional to the Old Testament seems to be if you like commandments of people commandments of men because the end of verse 14 literally says not paying attention to Jewish myths or to commandments of men who reject the truth these are people who are urging others their listeners to obey their human commandments but not in the end as Paul says the commandments of God now the quest for purity can be a great trap somehow if we think we want to be pure or holy we feel often that we need to perform some rite or ritual that we need to follow some form of religious practice or some religious rule but the

Bible's teaching about true purity and holiness is refreshingly simple purity comes through faith in Jesus Christ purity comes through embracing him purity comes within us by his spirit's work within as we embrace Jesus who died and rose for us and took away our sin purity comes through the spiritual cleansing that the power of the death of Jesus brings and that's refreshingly simple because there's no rite or ritual religious rule for us to follow to exercise to practice day in day out or in seasons of the year it is a work by Jesus Christ which we embrace with faith and therein lies all that is needed for spiritual purity that then explains what Paul is saying in verse 15 to the pure all things are pure that is to those who have real spiritual purity through faith in Christ those who are Christians everything is pure there's no unclean food that will make you impure all foods are clean there's no particular religious practice that will make you pure sin should be shunned but there's no unclean things to avoid anymore if you're spiritually pure through faith in Christ but on the other hand as he says in verse 15 to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure that is if you're not a believer in the truth of Jesus

Christ if you haven't embraced him and the spiritual purity that he gives within through faith then no ritual no right no rule no regulation will make you pure nothing in fact is pure at all even if you keep to the clean foods of the Old Testament it's not going to make you pure because purity comes within not from without purity is an internal matter of the heart and only Jesus does that through the gospel's teaching of his death and the power of his death to take away sin so what they say is actually the reverse of truth these idle talkers and these deceivers they were told at the end of in verse 16 at the beginning of verse 16 they profess to know God but in fact they don't know him because they've rejected his truth and in its place put along all their rules and regulations now you might think this is a little bit of an obscure argument that's going on here not something that's really crucial but it is crucial

[29 : 19] Paul's final verse really shows us just how crucial this is see he says that these false teachers their minds are corrupt at the end of verse 15 that is they don't think the truth their minds have been corrupted they think they're preaching the truth but they're not therefore their consciences are corrupt because if they're not thinking the truth then they're distorted in their moral evaluation of what is right and what is wrong and so their minds and their consciences are corrupt and therefore what they say is wrong they profess to know God they speak as though they know God in verse 16 but actually they don't and then finally the end of the cycle is their actions are wrong they deny God by their very actions they're greedy for gain they're dividing families all that sort of stuff see how the chain works their minds are wrong their consciences then are wrong their speech is then wrong and their actions are wrong now I think there's a bit of a warning here in our day and age it's probably not Jewish myths that are going to trap us but other forms of spiritual purity or other quests very often people who are preaching falsehood seek to compensate their falsehood and evil by some form of ritual or rule or regulation or practice beware such spirituality beware any spirituality that has as its heart rules regulations rights and rituals and practices that you must perform in order to attain some holiness or spiritual purity because all too often those external rights and rituals and rules and regulations are actually cloaking the deception that there is nothing in the heart spiritual purity comes from the heart and it comes from the gospel of

Jesus Christ and that is sufficient and that's all that matters so beware any form of spirituality and there are dozens around on the Sunday smorgasbord that you can see that are full of rules and regulations myths practices but they're cloaking the emptiness in the heart and note too in all of this how important our minds are see often we're very dismissive of our minds we think oh I don't want to go to a lecture and think about things it's what I do that matters yes what we do does matter but getting right what we do comes from thinking the truth and that's the connection through this passage as well if the teaching of spirituality around the place does not lead to an internal godliness reject it it is a fake it is a sham it is a fraud it is deceitful it doesn't matter how persuasive the speaker is or how attractive the people are in the end it's rubbish and as Paul says they should be silenced and if we're unable or not in a position to silence them we should at least close our ears to what they say and notice how he ends this whole passage he says at the very last sentence they are detestable disobedient unfit for any good work imagine that on your school report at the end of the year or on the reference that you get as you apply for a job it won't get you very far to be told you're detestable disobedient unfit for any good work the idea of being unfit for any good work in particular here has got the sense of something that's been tried and tested and it fails it's the sort of stuff that will end up on the second shelf in the reject shop it looks as though it'll do the job but you put it in the microwave and it'll fall apart and not do what it's meant to do it malfunctions it doesn't achieve its goal and remember what we've seen the last two weeks

God's gospel's goal is godliness and so the false teaching the deception that comes through these false teachers will never ever produce true godliness it's unfit for any good work it's not going to achieve that goal of godliness it's deficient it ought to be tossed out well if you've travelled in many countries especially but not only third world countries you'll often see warnings or read them in the travel books or whatever warnings against conmen warnings against being ripped off beware fake jewellery beware fake watches beware buying soccer shirts in Bangkok they're fake I mean sometimes people are honest enough to say genuine fake on the side of the shop beware fake investment scams and so on well in our country in our city we ought to have the same sort of warning beware the conmen beware being ripped off spiritually and this passage is a warning to us as we think about the various options that are paraded before us for spiritual purity and spirituality in our world don't be ripped off by idle talkers and deceivers don't be conned by human commandments by myths and rituals don't be deceived by greedy and divisive prattling preachers don't be taken in by the spiritual smorgasbord trick if you're in a position as a church leader silence such a person if you're not in such a position shut your ears and warn others to do the same because only

God's gospel of Jesus Christ is the real thing the genuine article it's only God's gospel of Jesus Christ that produces internal godliness in our hearts it's only God's gospel's goal that is godliness and we must not settle for anything less silence if you're dying you are answered half gonna answer, nicstra she is baptized Hahn