

FRAMEWORK FOR A HEALTHY CHURCH

Silencing Unsound Doctrine

1 Elders must identify teachers of unsound doctrine. (1:10)

2 Elders must silence teachers of unsound doctrine. (1:11-14)

3 Elders must not be fooled by the sheep clothing. (1:15-16)

Good morning, Church. I am Robin Harris, one of the elders of the church. As you know, the elders are teaching through Titus verse by verse. The Series is called FRAMEWORK FOR A HEALTHY CHURCH. As an engineer, when I think of a building's framework, I think of the structural members that keep the building standing under various forces and loads. Environmental forces are considered. Static and dynamic loads are considered. For example, if the wind loads or the snow loads are not accurately considered, then the structure could fail, and lives could be lost. You cannot rely on a cursory examination. The same goes for the health of the Church body. Having qualified elders overseeing the church is an important part of the framework of a healthy church.

Last week, Don Starnes covered 1:5-9, which included the qualifications for being an elder. These qualifications are testable and observable qualities used to determine the fitness of a man to serve as an elder.

The last qualification described in verse 9 is our lead-in verse for today's message. But before we look at that verse, I would like to set the tone with a few other verses. The first one is a favorite of mine, **Acts 20:28**

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God,^[a] which he obtained with his own blood.”

This verse brings out the weightiness of eldership. The words overseers and elders are synonymous; therefore, this verse is addressed to elders of the church. It says to pay attention to your spiritual walk as well as the spiritual walk of the whole flock. Then it says the Holy Spirit has made them

overseers. Not Paul, not other apostles, not other spiritual leaders, even though they are used to accomplish these appointments. And they were appointed to care for the church of God.

Then Luke ends this verse with the most powerful and weighty statement of all, “which he obtained with his own blood.” Other versions say, “purchased with his own blood”. This is not Pastor Tony’s church, this is not the elder’s church, this is Jesus Christ’s church. He bought it with His blood, and He wants elders to care for His church. Do you sense the weightiness of eldership?

Now, the second verse, **Hebrews 13:17**

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

Look closely at the accountability imposed on elders. Elders will give an account to God for how they have kept watch over the souls that Christ has purchased with his blood. This verse gives a whole new meaning to serve God with fear and trembling. **This is the descriptive tone as we now look at our Scripture for today.**

Listen to our lead-in verse.

1:9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound^[9] doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

The elder must hold firm to the trustworthy word for two very specific reasons.

- **In order to give instruction in sound doctrine.** In other words, to teach the congregation sound doctrine. This is a major part of the care for the church.
- **The second reason is to rebuke those who contradict it.** In other words, to silence teachers of unsound doctrine. This is also a very vital reality as the elders care for the body of Christ.

These are two very important reasons that God has placed elders in the framework of a healthy Church. Our text will cover the second reason in detail.

With that said, it is no surprise that the title of today's message is **Silencing Unsound Doctrine**. As you will see, the stakes are high and the battle is waging for the souls of people. Matter of fact, I am taking my cues from a very credible source, Jesus. I don't think there has been anyone who has silenced teachers of unsound doctrine so masterfully as Jesus.

So let's get into the text. Our text will show that elders of the church must root out unsound doctrine that infiltrates the church to maintain the spiritual health of the church. First,

1 Elders must identify teachers of unsound doctrine. (1:10)

1:10 For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.

Here is the scary thing right off the bat. Our text says there are many. Religious groups had hundreds of years to develop a set of unsound teachings that they used to control and pilfer well-meaning people. Jesus came on the scene and turned it all upside down. Now they are wolves in sheep's clothing. And they would penetrate into the churches. Listen to what Paul says in Acts as he gives instructions to the elders in Ephesus:

Acts 20:29-31 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

Paul made it clear to these overseers (elders) that they had to be on alert! Wolves would enter into the flock, and wolves would rise up amongst them. A two-front attack would happen. And these wolves would not care about the true spiritual health of the flock. And catch this, because it is so important, these wolves are teachers speaking twisted things. They are not passively sitting and listening to sound doctrine. They are actively teaching

and spreading unsound doctrine. They have a little truth twisted together with unsound doctrine.

They can penetrate into children's ministry, they can engage in small groups, they can be a part of the men's or women's ministry, they can make it onto the worship team, etc They can do this because they are camouflaged with sheep clothing. On the flip side, some come in openly and boldly with unsound doctrine. This is what happened in the churches of Galatia when Judaizers went about teaching that you must be circumcised in order to be saved, ie, Jesus plus works. Many fell prey to these wolves, and Paul had to deal with it.

So there would be many. Then Paul gives Titus some key identifiers in verse 10.

- They are insubordinate.
- They are empty talkers.
- They are deceivers.

Even though they can penetrate the congregation, they will eventually reveal certain identifiers. Let's look at each of these one at a time. What does he mean by insubordinate? Other versions use the word rebellious. The Greek word means not subject to rule, unruly. You could also say that they did not fall in line with the truth of sound doctrine. They had their own "doctrine," and it was not sound doctrine. They rebelled against sound doctrine.

You may have encountered this as a believer. Paul surely did. For example, the unsound doctrine of Hymenaeus and Philetus. These two characters rebelled from the truth. Look at 2 Timothy 2:16-18

"But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some."

What do you think would happen when people were taught that the resurrection had already happened? They would freak! Most commentaries believe they were saying that there is just a spiritual resurrection and not a future bodily resurrection. What is the truth? There is a spiritual resurrection, but there is also a bodily resurrection. Their unsound doctrine went directly against what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 15. **John MacArthur says this about their unsound doctrine:**

“To deny or distort the truth about the resurrection is to deny and distort the heart of the gospel.”

Paul says stuff like this spreads like gangrene, and it did!

Ex. I recall a prominent man in a church who started teaching that you don't have to ask God for forgiveness of sin after you become a believer. His main point was that God has forgiven you of all sin, including past, present, and future.

Has God forgiven believers of past, present, and future sins? Yes, that is true. Is it true that we do not have to ask forgiveness for sin now that we are believers? No, this is not true. This is unsound doctrine. His unsound doctrine had truth twisted together with unsound doctrine. It spread like gangrene. What does the Bible say in 1 John 1:9?

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 1:9 wasn't written to unbelievers; it was written to believers. John calls his audience “my little children”, “beloved”, and “children” throughout the letter.

So, what is the truth? As believers, we are forgiven of all our sins. That is relative to salvation and our relationship with God. But we continue to ask for forgiveness of sin and repent as we sin, because this relates to our growing sanctification and fellowship with God.

Can you imagine how sin would be unchecked? Because this guy would not stop promoting this unsound doctrine, the leadership of that church had to ask him to leave the church. It was a big deal in the community.

Now look at the phrase **empty talkers in verse 10**. Other versions use the phrase meaningless talk, useless talk, vain talk. The Greek word for this phrase is only found here in the Bible. It basically means saying a lot of nothing with a lot of vigor. Shakespeare would have described them as “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

In our day, it is the preacher who gets up before the congregation and speaks without using the Word of God, only giving intellectual insight, whimsical illustrations, motivational talking points, and thought-provoking nonsense. They are very convincing, but there is no profit in what they say.

Listen, all Scriptural is profitable, but man's empty talk has no profit!

So they would be rebellious wolves with their own truth. They would be empty talkers who would inspire spiritual vanity. And lastly, they would be **deceivers**.

Does this surprise us? No, it does not. Satan is the father of lies. The deceiver of the whole world, Revelation 12:9. So naturally, these wolves are deceivers. Satan appears like an angel of light, deceiving many, and these deceivers are wolves in sheep's clothing out to deceive the body of Christ.

Empty talkers have a partnership with deception.

Then Paul identifies not just the characteristics of these wolves, but he identifies a particular group having these characteristics. He identifies the circumcision party. This is the group that was saying you must get circumcised in order to be saved, ie, Jesus plus works. Refer to our Galatians study for more on that.

Paul has said there will be many. They will be unruly, empty talkers and deceivers. They will be wolves in sheep's clothing. So, according to Paul, what are the elders to do?

Write this down:

2 Elders must silence teachers of unsound doctrine. (1:11-14)

Titus 1:11-14 They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to

teach. ¹² One of the Cretans,^[1] a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.”^[1] ¹³ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

Teachers of unsound doctrine must be silenced. The word “silence” means to put a muzzle on the mouth. That is a pretty harsh statement, but it is a necessary one. Why silence them? “They are upsetting whole families by teaching unsound doctrine. They would subvert the faith of whole families by their unsound doctrine. Just like Hymenaeus and Philetus, these teachers could cause members of the congregation to stray from the truth of the Word.

And notice that they were doing it for shameful gain, to gain a following, to gain an advantage, and to gain money. Red flag!!!!

The guy that I told you about... he didn't just keep it to himself; he wanted a following.

Unsound doctrine can take hold of people, and it is gangrene. It will spread!

Then, in verse 13, Paul gives us a very good general view of the Cretans, which highlights the urgency of his exhortation. He uses the general view as stated by one of their own. The guy's name is not mentioned, but commentaries believe it is Epimenides, a poet in the sixth century B.C. He was a highly respected Greek intellectual of the time. Being a Cretan himself, he said they

“are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons”

Wow... tell me how you really feel. This is a sense of the general population. This was not a Utopia of truth, so being on alert for wolves in sheep's clothing was highly warranted. To be naïve about it would be an absolute disgrace.

Do you think it is much different in America today? No, it is not. Today, lies are acceptable if they achieve the end goal.

Then Paul makes it absolutely clear what to do. **“Therefore rebuke them sharply”**

Now, before we continue, you see in this sentence “them” and “they”.

Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.

At first, you may think that these two words are addressing the same group, ie, rebuke **them**, so **they** may be sound in faith. Actually, the two words are not referring to the same group. We have already seen that the “them” are wolves in sheep's clothing. Their identity revealed that they were insubordinate, empty talkers, deceivers, and many propagating Jesus plus works.

The “they” in the verse are those who could be impacted by the unsound doctrine of the “them”, if the elders did not sharply rebuke them.

Now look at the two striking words used by Paul. **Rebuke sharply**. Just to say rebuke would have been descriptive enough, but Paul puts extra emphasis on this command. To rebuke is to bring to light what is wrong, by using sound doctrine and with a stern voice. And they were to do it sharply! This word means to cut severely and descriptively with a knife or ax. And not to just make a mark, but cut off. I like the ax visual.

So, Paul is saying take sound doctrine as an ax and cut off the unsound doctrine.

A preacher and medical doctor once said this,

“As a physician, I know that the most thorough, certain cure to prevent the spread of cancer is complete excision of the initial lesion. So too the surgeon of the soul cuts to achieve a cure and make what is diseased sound.

There is a temptation in the church today to not confront (ever in love) destructive, divisive error and to be “measly mouthed” and resist calling such “spiritual cancer” what it really is.”

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Elders cannot be mealy-mouthed about unsound doctrine infiltrating the church body.

Why do you think that some denominations today embrace homosexuality to the extent that they ordain homosexuals to be pastors, when 20, 30 years ago it would have been unheard of in their churches? Wolves were unchecked. The ax of sound doctrine wasn't used. They were mealy-mouthed! And today, it is too late for them. They have gone the way of the world.

Listen, Elders must silence teachers of unsound doctrine sharply with sound doctrine. Why.....

So that believers are sound in faith “14 not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.”

Lastly,

3 Elders must not be fooled by the sheep clothing. (1:15-16)

“15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. ¹⁶ They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.”

When Paul refers to the pure in verse 15, he is speaking about believers. Also, it is an inward purity. It is the purity we receive when we put our trust in Jesus Christ. It is the righteousness of Christ. We cannot produce this purity. We are completely destitute and defiled within our hearts before we receive the righteousness of Christ.

If you haven't put your trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, the Bible teaches that you are not a good person, you don't have a good heart, your heart is

not pure, and in the eyes of God, you are His enemy. Settle that today. Go from being an enemy of God to a child of God.

Now, when it says to the pure, all things are pure, it is not saying that since believers have the righteousness of Christ, everything we do is pure, everything in our heart is pure, and everything that we want to do and do is pure. Even Paul said in Romans 7 that he does what he doesn't want to do, and the things he wants to do, he doesn't do them. We are not sinlessly perfect in our walk.

So, what is Paul saying? What does he mean when he says, "all things are pure"? It is concerning the commandments of people shown in verse 14. These commandments were man-made ceremonial laws of the Jews. Outward traditions that "demonstrated that they were righteous".

What Paul is doing with this phrase is contrasting between believers and unbelieving wolves in sheep's clothing. The false believing Jews had traditions that were outward works to "demonstrate that they were righteous". Of these were ceremonial laws, such as ceremonially washing your hands before eating or only eating certain things, even on certain days, as an expression of righteousness. Both of these were considered very important to them, and those who did not follow these man-made laws were defiled.

Paul is saying that believers are righteous because of Christ and free from man's traditions that have no value for righteousness before God. So, to not ceremonially wash your hands was not unrighteous. Matter of fact, deeming it of no righteous value was pure. The same would be said of eating pork, especially barbecue short ribs!!! To the pure, it is pure...and delicious! Amen!

As we know, Peter had to learn this from God. God showed him in a dream that all things are good to eat that are eaten with thanksgiving.

Continuing, Paul's statement sets up his next statement, which takes the inward condition of the heart and the outward commandments of men, and addresses directly the wolves in sheep's clothing.

But the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure. Why? Nothing is pure because the inner man is not pure. The outward actions are not pure because the inner man is not pure. The outward actions had an inward defiled motive, ie, appearance of righteousness or even worse, works for righteousness. Their minds and their consciences were defiled.

The Pharisees, who constantly attacked Jesus, painted themselves outwardly to be really religious by their empty traditions, but Jesus said, **“For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.**

Even what seems to be good is not pure because of the impurity of the heart. A cow patty is still a cow patty even if you paint it.

Elders cannot be fooled by the sheep clothing. Underneath the sheep clothing of wolves, professing they know God, are **detestable, disobedient, defiled minds and souls.** Nothing is pure, and their deeds would eventually reveal it.

All of this is why the qualifications for an elder are so important and not just a suggestion. Certainly, you see now why Paul told Titus to appoint elders that...

“.....hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound^[9] doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

In summary, why does God want qualified elders appointed?

- To teach sound doctrine.
- To silence unsound doctrine.

And why does God want that? So that the church body remains healthy and growing. **Elders are a part of the framework for a healthy Church.**

So, what are some other takeaways for us as the body of Christ?

1 Pray for your elders. Their service to you is a weighty one. We need the ongoing grace of God in order to serve Him well.

- 2 **Understand the role of the elders.** It is a very important spiritual role within the body of Christ. Shepherding is essential, and we as elders take it very seriously.
- 3 **Know that when an elder is appointed within this body, they are scrutinized carefully and prayerfully.** We want the Holy Spirit guiding us. Remember that the stakes are high.
- 4 **Pray that God would continue to raise up a new generation of elders.** Each elder serves a 3-year term and can serve an additional 3 years. After that, an elder will rotate off the elder board, and we will need a new elder to replace him.
- 5 **Lastly, be prepared,** unfortunately, sometime along the way, the elders will need to silence teachers of unsound doctrine. Satan wants to infiltrate this church body because God is at work here, we are growing, and there is spiritual life and fruitfulness. Right!