

**Lake Cities Community Church**  
**Take the Next Step: Book of Titus**  
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## **Competing Voices**

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Tony Mirrelli (name changed) was a football player at Northern Arizona University. He lived in Tinsley Hall which was an undergraduate dorm for 400 men. I met Tony on my first day as the new Residence Hall Director at Tinsley. I was 22 years old, in graduate school, and was very excited about the opportunity to shape young lives. I had a vision: not for a perfect dorm, but one that was positive and supported student learning.

Tony was in the lobby talking loudly on the phone. His posture was one of arrogance. He was shirtless, to display his football player muscles, and he had wrapped around his left arm a large yellow snake. Now, to live in the residence hall each student had to sign a code-of-conduct form where they agreed to abide by the rules. One rule was that no pets or animals were allowed. I waited patiently for Tony to get off the phone.

“Hi, my name is Craig. I am the new RHD,” I said in my most friendly voice. “What is your name?” “*John Smith,*” Tony replied. Now I didn’t know Tony’s real name, but I was not completely naive. “OK,” I continued with an arched eyebrow and a little more authority, “Did you know that it is against Hall policy for you to have a snake?” “*Whatever,*” he replied coldly and walked off. I decided not to confront him right there, and instead followed him to his room and noted the room number.

He lived on the first floor – east wing. What I soon learned is that my meeting with Tony was reflective of the culture of the whole building. Tinsley Hall was a place of disrespect and abundant lying! Many of the other students felt as if they were held hostage in the dorm. On the

weekends, there were fights, large underage drinking parties even riots. We had sinks ripped off the walls in the bathrooms, couches set on fire in the stairwells, vandalism and thefts. I knew the campus police officers by name. When I first arrived I noticed that our lobby furniture was ripped up and broken. When I requested new chairs and couches, the facilities department said, “We won’t give you news ones, because your students will just destroy them.” And they were right.

It all started with the first floor - east wing. Over the past few years several students who had been kicked out of other dorms for disciplinary reasons had been transferred to Tinsley Hall, all to the first floor, east wing. These rebel voices set the tone for the rest of the building. Their voices competed with my voice and the voices of my staff – the worked against our vision for a safe place to live and learn. And the loudest voice of all was Tony Mirelli.

Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation? Maybe in a church, or at work, or with your family? In the battle of good and evil, evil appears to be winning! The quiet voice of reason is drowned out. The accurate voice of truth is disregarded. You want a healthy culture – or a godly environment, but it is not there yet. How do you change a culture? How do you take the next step toward reversing the trends? It has a lot to do with competing voices.

That is the situation confronting us this morning as we again open up the book of Titus. Paul wanted his voice to be heard, and the voice of Titus - but the loudest voice in Crete was their Tony Mirelli – what Paul calls False Teachers. If you have your Bibles please turn with me to Titus chapter 1, verses 10-16. *This morning the issue is competing voices – whose will win the day?*

As we enter into the text this morning, we will first look at the problem of false teachers in the church. Once we have that problem in view, we will look to understand the solution to the problem and third I will share some points of application.

### **The Problem:**

**Cultural Background:** Someone has said that defining the problem is half the solution. And I agree with that. If I wanted to change the culture of Tinsley Hall, I first needed to understand very specifically what the problems were. Similarly, Paul wants Titus to be clear about the problems he would face. Look at verse 12. **A certain one of them, in fact, one of their own prophets, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.”** Paul is quoting a famous Cretan authority named Epimenides who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Paul is obviously not saying that every person fits these characteristics, but that is the culture. As a positive example, if I say, “Texas Hospitality” - that may not be true of everyone in Texas, but it is generally true of this part of the county. Knowing this background is key – look back at verse 12.

Paul envisioned a church that embraced the truth – but the culture valued lies. A poem written to Zeus in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. says: “Cretans are always liars. For a Tomb, O Lord, Cretans build for you; but you did not die for you are forever.” The Greek word “Cretizo” – means “to lie.” Paul also envisioned a church which valued quiet, godly living, but the culture was one of violence and indulgence. Some countries fear wild animals, but in Crete they had wild people. As a seafaring community, a culture of thieving and robbery developed. Cicero wrote, “The Cretans consider piracy and robbery honorable.” The Cretan people were a lazy and gluttonous people – indulging the senses with pleasure and the easy life made possible with wealth. Another ancient writer said, “So much in fact do sordid love of gain and lust for power

for wealth prevail among them, that the Cretans are the only people in the world in whose eyes no gain is disgraceful” (Polybius).

That is the culture in which these new church plants are attempting to become established: a sensual, materialistic, self-centered, greedy culture. Does that sound familiar? Our church plant is not all that different. *Paul is saying that the church is by design counter-cultural – truth in the face of lies, goodness in the face of evil.*

**Church Background:** But the problem does not end with understanding the culture, in fact it gets worse – the sins of the culture had entered into the church itself. Look at the specific characteristics of the false teachers. Verse 10. First, they are described first as “**rebellious people.**” Like Tony Mirelli – not interested in listening to authority – Not interested in accountability. Second, they are “**idle talkers.**” These are people who love to talk and debate, but do very little in the way of application or good deeds. It is intellectualism run amuck. Paul is saying talk is cheap – when it is done in expense of good deeds and action. Third, the false teachers are “**deceivers, especially those with Jewish connections.**” We see that the false teachers are Jews who are trying to sell a bill of goods – something that is not in fact true. Now they might themselves believe it is true. They may be sincerely deceived. This is explained in verse 14: “**not paying attention to Jewish myths and commands of people who reject the truth.**” The false teachers apparently started with the Old Testament, and the law, but then added onto it Jewish myths, rituals and thereby left the truth of God. Their idea was the Scripture *plus* this other man-made teaching. Remember the story I told about the devil and the demon walking down the road. The man in front of them picks up something shiny. “What is that,” asks the

demon? “A piece of the truth,” the devil responds. “Aren’t you worried he has found a piece of the truth,” the demon asks? “No” said the devil, “I will just have him start a religion with it.”

Take a piece of the truth and add to it. Look at verse 15: **All is pure to those who are pure. But to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their minds and consciences are corrupted.**” Commentators tell us that these teaches probably taught an ascetic lifestyle – rituals and mystical ways to stay pure and clean. Now, is purity a good thing and a Christian thing? Yes – but the false teachers were promoting man-made traditions – legalistic practices. Paul said you can’t add to Scripture and retain its truth – if you are corrupt and unbelieving in the true truth – nothing is pure – no matter how hard you try. Many cults follow this pattern – take a piece of the truth, of Christianity and add something to it – Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, Christian Science and other groups have destroyed the truth by adding onto it the teaching of men.

False teaching often takes the truth and adds to it, or in some cases to take away from it. This is a quote from a Christian ministry: “As a ministry, we believe in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. However, the Bible does not use the word 'trinity' and our feeling is that the word 'trinity' implies equality in leadership, or shared Lordship. If God wanted us to refer to Himself, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit as the 'trinity,' He would not have left this word completely out of the Bible. I believe that Jesus and God are two separate beings.” That was Gwen Shamblin founder of the popular Weigh Down Workshops. The magazine Christianity today broke this story a few years ago. In response to that Shamblin told Christianity Today: "People don't care about this. They don't care about the Trinity. This is going to pass. What the women want is weight loss. Gwen Shamblin.

Paul is saying to the elders of the church – even if other people don't care – you must care! You must protect the faith – so that it is neither added to nor subtracted from. There were competing voices in the church leading people away from the truth – that was a serious problem.

## **Solution**

Look at verse 11 – the solution is clear. Paul says, “**The must be silenced because they mislead whole families by teaching for dishonest gain what ought not to be taught.**” This is a strong command – they must be silenced – the picture is a muzzle being placed on an animal – so they cannot open their mouths. Why – because whole families were being torn apart – and to make matters worse the false teachers were cashing in on the heresy.

At Tinsley Hall I knew I had to address Tony Mirelli. His competing voice was leading the whole building into confusion, but I had the responsibility and authority. So I met with him, charged him with his wrongdoing, showed him the correct way to behave and assured him that with some changes he could be a valued and contributing member of the community. I did not want Tony to be transferred again to another hall, but for him to reform and get the message now.

That was also Paul's desire – to redeem them verse 13: “**Rebuke them sharply that they may be healthy in the faith – and not pay attention to Jewish myths.** Come back to sound doctrine – Come back to the truth, Paul said.

But whether or not they would return, the voices of untruth and rebellion had to be silenced so that the voice of truth and godliness might be heard. Paul's command to silence the competing voices of false doctrine is perhaps the most offensive thing in this whole book for our

21<sup>st</sup> century culture. To silence another person's view of the truth even in the church, is a great offense in our society.

Christianity Today received these kind of letters for exposing Shamblin's views of the Trinity. From Todd: "I find it very disturbing that a publication supposedly representing Christian values would use the term "heretic" or some form of it, to describe one with slightly different beliefs than themselves." And if this was a gray area, a peripheral issue, he would be right – But when it comes to the cardinal doctrine of the faith – we must hold and defend those. And this from Angie: "I believe this whole matter has been totally blown out of proportion...Be careful of what you speak for you are condemning a good ministry that proves itself by its fruit. Many people have changed lives because of Weigh Down. Remember last week – as long as you are winning games, improving the economy, winning the war – we don't care what you believe! Yet Paul made it clear – for the church to hold to sound doctrine that leads to godly living, the church must silence and reform the false teachers. That is the needed solution.

### **Application**

How does this message apply to us today? I think a message on false teaching is easy to dismiss - that is not a problem with us. I don't diet anyway! I'm not going to join a cult. Let's move on. But let's just take a moment to consider how this might apply to your life.

The first lesson I think we take from this passage is that **we are more a product of our culture than we realize**. Just like the church at Crete - we too take on the sin of the culture in our lives and in our churches. We tend toward legalism – adding to the Scripture and thinking somehow we can be pure, or holy, on our own efforts. Our theology can be a product of our culture. We view God as our servant – As Carl Anderson says – “The big vending machine in the

sky” – up there to make us happy. And if I put in my money and I don’t get what I want – I get mad at him. Where does it say in the Bible that God always wants you to be healthy or have money in your pocket? Does God heal – yes, He can, and He does provide, but we demand of God like he were a waiter at Olive Garden. Gone are the days, like I read in Time magazine years ago that Billy Graham was careful to only accept a modest salary from his ministry over the years. In contrast, I read in the newspaper recently about another minister today who takes home millions of dollars a year. He said that it is important that the children of our generation see a successful godly person, that they might be motivated to follow Christ. We can’t dismiss this lesson as not applicable – we must realize that the sins of our culture creep easily into God’s church. Lying, greed and religious myths are not something that are only found in secular university dorms, or in first century churches.

The second lessons follow the first – and that is for us as a church to **pray for our church leadership** – I hope you do this – I can tell you I need it, badly. If the church is to be healthy it will start at the top – with humble servant leaders who model godly living and sound doctrine – who are willing to contest for the truth. Pray for me and Micah, Larry, John, Roger – we need your prayers as we seek to protect and lead this flock. So guard your own heart and life and family, and pray for your leaders as we seek to protect this church.

**Conclusion:** I wish I could tell you that Tony Mirelli responded well to my correction, but he did not – his rebellion got worse. He continued to fight against authority and break rules and lead rebellion in the dorm. So after several attempts he was removed from the Hall and expelled from the university. Not all stories have happy endings. A few days after he was kicked out he broke into the dorm by punching his fist through the safety glass and opened the door from the inside. With a bloody hand he shouted my name and sought me out. He was arrested

and I never heard from him again. Silencing a competing voice of false doctrine is not an easy thing – it may in fact be kind of messy. But after Tony was gone the whole culture of the dorm began to change and after two years, it was once again a desirable place to live. But they needed a new voice to get to that new culture – the old voice had to go. Paul said to Titus – you are that new voice – you have the truth of the gospel from God Himself – silence the competing voices and proclaim God’s truth! Let’s pray.