

# Holding Fast to Sound Doctrine

Pastor and Author A.W. Tozer

March 16, 1958

The book of Titus, the first chapter. The book of Titus. Word by word almost, we're going over this book. Verse seven, the bishop must be so on. Verse nine, holding fast the faithful word as ye hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine, convince, to exhort, and to convince against errors. For there are many unholy and vain talkers and deceivers, especially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped; who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own said, the Cretians, Cretians it is here. Cretan, it is in almost every other version and in the dictionary, so chances are, that I will be seeing Cretan, though Cretian it is in this particular version. The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith.

Now in about three or four sentences, I want to relate today's talk to those which have preceded it. Paul says by the Spirit that bishops, presbyters, that means teachers. And I would assume it includes pastors and others who try to expound the Scripture. That among other qualifications, they must hold fast to the faithful word. They must have ability in sound doctrine, for the dual work of teaching the teachable and silencing the gainsayers. Now, that relates what I am to say from here on, to what I've said before, and what Paul wrote, for after all, that's what I'm trying to do, to make what I'm saying hug very, very tightly to what Paul said before.

Now, we have the expression, there are many unruly. And I honestly am sorry that I have to deal with this, with these words, unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, because I don't like to. I'd much rather talk over on the happy side of things. But in a world of sin and the devil, a world that is all out of moral focus, where the church is like a flock of sheep in the wilderness surrounded by a wolf even where the wolves put on the garment of dead sheep, and come and run with the flock. And the poor sheep don't recognize it.

Well, you've got to deal with things as they are. Wouldn't it be comfortable if we never had to deal with ill health? In a world like this, if nobody ever had to pick up the newspaper and read so and so is in the hospital? Wouldn't it be a comfortable world if nobody ever got sick, if there was no enemy called sickness? Wouldn't it be comfortable if there was no such thing as known as an accident, if we never picked up a newspaper and read so and so was killed in an accident on the highway or in the factory or on the farm? Wouldn't it be a comfortable world if we never saw in the newspaper, so and so was held up last week and robbed of \$3,000, he was beaten over the head by the gunman, no crime anywhere? Just a world without crime, without accidents, without ill health, without death. It would be a comfortable world, nice place to stay.

And wouldn't it be ideal if there were no unruly persons? No vain talkers and deceivers anywhere, but the truth just grew without cultivation. No weeds to cut down, no hard ground to break up with a hoe? But we just taught the Word and everybody smiled and received it and began to obey it. Nobody came rushing in upset about what had been done? It would be a comfortable, beautiful world. But you know, that's not the way it is. And maturity requires that we deal with things as they are, not as we wish they were.

There is a kind of religion of Christianity, a form of it, a weakened, watered form of it, that honestly and I think well-meaning the people are, they try to make Christianity to be just that. They look at the world with one eye, the good eye. They see the sunset, but they never see the storm. They hear the birds sing, but they never see the vultures. They see the roses, but their blind eye will not look at the thorns. They hear the happy laughter, but they will not hear the moans. They see the joyous Christian, but they will not acknowledge the presence of the unruly, the deceiver, and the vain talker. Now, that is spiritual immaturity.

If I were in serious trouble, and I were wanting to send, if I actually got where I had to have prayer help from somebody, I wouldn't send for a man who had a reputation of never facing reality. I couldn't because I would be calling a spiritual boy into my presence. I would be calling an immature child into my presence. I wouldn't want to send for too happy a man if I were in serious difficulty with my family or myself. And if I wanted somebody to consult with and to pray with me, I wouldn't send for a man if he's too happy. Because in a world like this, if you're too happy, you're immature, because an immature man sees with only one eye. He sees all the happy things, but he doesn't see the other side. He won't face it.

Paul wrote from the prison and said, rejoice and again I will say, rejoice. But in the next breath, he said, I write unto you even weeping. And he said, sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. He was a mature man, he saw both sides. And I would want a man who had within him a spiritual buoyancy that came from the engrossment with a resurrected Christ, I would want to come to pray with me if I were in trouble. A man whose heart was buoyant with the inward lift of the life of God, but whose heart was also heavy with the griefs of the world, then, I would have a mature Christian. So, I can't skip this, unruly and vain talkers. I can't skip this, it's here, and maturity requires that we deal with it.

Now, the unruly. Dean Spence of Gloucester, a famous old Bible expositor said this, this unruly person, He said, nominally he's in the congregation of Christians, but in reality, refusing all obedience, acting for himself, factious and insubordinate. That was the definition of the Dean of Gloucester put on this word, unruly. In the congregation of Christians normally, but in reality, back of the nominal, which is in name, the real have these four counts against him: refusing all obedience, acting for himself, factious and insubordinate.

Now, such as this is self will of course, headstrong and defiant. You know it just occurs to me, that I've stopped being defiant. I think there was a time when I was pretty defiant. I know as a boy I always was defiant, and I didn't care how big the fellow was. I defied him even though I was scared stiff. I defied him. And when I got converted, I carried that spirit of defiance over into the church. And a lot that used to pass for courage, was just defiance. But I find that that's gone out of me. I don't defy anybody.

I got a letter from a man, a young man who said he was an undergraduate in a certain college. He said he hesitated to criticize me but felt he had to. Then he wrote me a lone letter taking me apart. And he said, I defy you. Well, it struck me, it had been a long time since I use that expression, I defy you. While the Scripture says that even Michael the Archangel, when disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, didn't dare say I defy you. He said the Lord rebuke thee.

The defiant man imagines he's strong, but he's not, he's just carnal. And he will allow himself to go on in that way, defiant, headstrong, and self-willed. He's hurting only himself. Then, such of course scorns the spirit of the flock. We're members of the flock, and there's a spirit in the flock. And the unruly defies that spirit, scorns it and refuses the voice of the Shepherd and the under shepherd and set their personal opinion against the pastor and all the godly Christians, and the whole church.

Now, this is the state of heart that brought about the fall of Satan. Satan defied God Almighty, and he defied rules and laws and all the rest. It's also the state of heart that brought about the fall of Adam. Adam was obviously defiant. And it was the state of heart that brought and kept Israel in constant turmoil into, and kept in constant turmoil. Always backsliding and getting restored again and tearfully bruised and beaten and then repent and be restored, and then get defiant and headstrong and go down again.

The whole history of Israel was like that. And it's a tragic thing, that even when Messiah came, they defied Him and said, we won't have this man to rule over us. And what was supposed to be strong, manly courage, was satanic defiance. And their rejection and dispersion throughout the whole world, the ghastly pogroms and ghettos and gas chambers and massacres and assassinations that have occurred all down the years have been the result of this rejection. And this defiance on the part of Israel caused them to crucify Christ. Well, we all measure ourselves and see that's all, whether we are in this class or not. Certainly, there are not many here, if any, but if there should be any who measure, I'm talking about this unwillingly. I wish I could skip it. But as a mature teacher of the word, I dare not, for everywhere, these are, just as everywhere there's sickness.

Now, we come to the vain talkers and deceivers. They're the restless, uneasy spirits who quote Scripture for their purpose. But they're empty talkers. And Paul says about them, whose mouths must be stopped. Now, why not let them alone. Those who believe in the letting alone process quote the passage that says let the weeds and the wheat grow together until the harvest. But what they overlook is, that the weeds and the good grain grow together in the field and the field is the world. But he never said let the weeds grow in the church. He said, let the sheep and the wolves live in the world. But he didn't say let the wolves live in the sheep fold. There's a difference there. We've got to watch it.

But he says if you try to weed out by too strict preaching, if you try to weed out any of the vain, unruly persons and vain-talkers, you're likely to root out some of the good plants along with them. Let the two grow together until the harvest. Yes, grow together in the world, but not grow together in the church. Paul said, whose mouths must be stopped. Why? Because they subvert whole houses. Now, the word subvert means to overthrow by undermining the morals of and destroying the allegiance or faith of, undermining the morals or destroying the allegiance or the faith. He says the reason these unruly vain-talkers have to be silenced is that they subvert whole houses.

Now let's talk a little bit about this subverting whole houses. You know what Paul means here is, whole churches. Because you see, in the day of Paul, they hadn't begun to build church houses yet. And they only met in synagogues, or preached in synagogues, and they met in people's houses, in upper rooms, wherever they could meet. They hadn't any church buildings yet. So they met in the houses of the people.

You remember in Acts 12, when James had been slain with a sword, and they took Peter intending to bring him forth and slay him, but it says . . . I remember Dr. Torrey divided that up for preaching like this. But prayer was made, continually of the church, unto God, for him. Isn't that an outline for a sermon? Prayer was made continually, of the church, unto God, for him. The result was, God sent an angel and turned Peter loose, took him out and set him free. And Peter lit out immediately. Where do you suppose he lit up for? To find the church of course. He knew that they were praying for him where the church met. And that particular church met in the house of Mark, his mother, Mary, the mother of Mark whose surname was John. So, there was a house.

Now, that was a church meeting in the house. And that's what it meant when Paul says, to the saints in thy house I send my greetings. That's what he meant when he said, he preached the gospel publicly and from house to house, as we might say, on the street and from church to church.

So, the word "house" is used to mean the church. You see, we've got it backwards now. We use the word church to mean the building. And we use the word that belongs to the people and attach it to the building. They use the word that belonged to the building and attached it to the church. But

nobody got mad. The Lord didn't send judgment. There are Christians now, who if we say this is a church here, why, they fly white with shock. They say, don't you realize that the church is the Body of Christ, and this building is just a building? Why sure we realize that. But brethren, we have one thing that governs us. We make words our servants. We never let words become our masters.

And when I say, the third Presbyterian Church or the First Baptist Church, everybody knows I don't mean the building. Everybody knows what I mean. And if I'm referring to the building, everybody knows I'm referring to the building. So nobody has ever yet been deceived by our use of the word church to mean a building. It's an extension of a word. You will say, a motion was made from the floor that such and such be done. Well, what did they mean by that? Why, they mean the people standing on the floor or sitting on chairs from the floor of the House made a motion. They don't mean the floor made the motion.

When we say that there will be a meeting of the board, we don't mean there'll be four pine boards meet in the pastor study. They used to sit around a board, and so the word was extended from the board where they met, to the people that met around the board. It's the same with a House of Representatives. When it says it has not yet been passed by the House, we don't mean the building there in Washington, we mean the several hundred men who sit in that House. So let's not get enslaved to words.

When it says the church which is in thy house. Why, he was explaining when he says, the saints in thy house. And he says, you preach the gospel from house to house. They met in houses and they extended the word to cover the people that met in that house, and we do the same thing. We've reversed it and we say church, meaning the the building sometimes. So, the church can mean, according to our English, either the building or the people. And nobody's ever deceived. But there are semantic slaves who insist upon being accurate in everything, so accurate, that it's a pain to be around.

Well, now what are you going to do with the unruly, the vain talkers and the deceivers? How can we deactivate them? Is that the word they used to take the trigger out of a bomb so it is harmless? I remember when one of the huge atom or hydrogen bombs didn't go off. They had to send some fellows up there to pull the stinger out of it. And I'll tell you, I shook for those fellows for a couple of days until I found they got their job done. Can you imagine going up a high tower to pull the stinger out of an atom bomb. And if you made a little mistake, you'd be instantly atomized, literally atomized. I am not fooling, I mean that. They would be literally made into atoms. You'd never know what has happened. Talk about the cool nerves of a man like that. I would have lost fourteen pounds in perspiration just walking from the building to the tower. But those calm, cool fellows went up there and did it. They pulled the stinger and came back down smiling and said it done.

Well, how do you deactivate these unruly people and vain-talkers and deceivers and make them harmless? Well, the Scripture says you do it by setting forth the Faithful Word and by sound doctrine, convincing and exhorting, so that all the efforts to subvert is harmless. The only perfect defense against error is truth. And the only defense against the big lies is the big truth. Always remember that.

I got a letter from a man in Brazil in reading the Alliance Weekly. He said I fled from Germany under Hitler and from somewhere else under Stalin. And he said I don't want you ever to write anything with politics in it. I've had enough. Well, poor fellow, I don't blame him, the fellow that had to fly from a devil and a bear and a tiger. I understand that. I think I know what he means. But I will venture to step aside long enough to say this, that if we plain Americans were sufficiently convinced of the soundness of our position, we wouldn't have anything at all to worry about from the subverters from Moscow. But because a lot of Americans aren't convinced, they tremble before the impact of the big lie. But do you know how to meet the big lie, with the big truth?

And it's the same in the church of Christ. You meet the big lie with a big truth, and the only defense against the deceiver is the Spirit of truth. For Paul said, you Christians there in Crete, you look out. And you teachers, you've been sound in the faith and careful, hold the Faithful Word because remember Cretians are always liars. That's a proverb down the years, lie like a Cretian they say. Thomas Hardy has that in one of his books, lie like a Cretian. Well, they said Cretians are always liars. If somebody says, and then he adds, of course the rather awkward expression, always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies, lazy people. But somebody says, don't you think that was a sweeping generalization?

That's what I get criticized for so much they say, "but you make sweeping generalizations." Well, Paul made a sweeping generalization here for a man. He hadn't studied logic I suppose, so he said, Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. Paul, is it possible that you can indict a whole nation? Yes, it is possible. For don't you know that there have been great cities that have gone completely rotten. Look at Sodom and Gomorrah. They had gotten so completely rotten that only half a dozen people got out. Is it possible to corrupt a whole population? Look at the flood. They had become so completely corrupt morally, that the only thing God could do with them was to drown them all except eight people that he picked out who had yet a bit of decency left in them.

And it's possible if you have read the history of England about the time of the Wesleys. You won't believe what you read. You won't believe it. The complete corruption of moral standards. At that time, the Wesley's came forth and began to preach, and historians said saved England from a revolution. There would have been a revolution grown up out of that rot, except they repented. And they did repent under the Wesleys.

When I was a kid, I used to, long toward the Spring, go into apple barrels or apple boxes. We didn't have refrigeration, so we had to do what we could do to keep our fruit overwinter. And sometimes, a box of apples would rot. And it would rot so completely that if you just stick your hand into it up to there. And boys don't mind that, so I used to do it and feel around and I'd feel one hard apple and take that out, wash it off. And you can believe this or not. There would be one apple completely sound, not even smell of the rot after it was washed, because there wasn't a single break in the skin anywhere. It was sound all over and in the midst of that rot, there was one or two maybe, or half a dozen sound apples. I've seen that.

So, in a city like Sodom, there were eight people, or a few people, and by the time of the flood, they were eight. And the time Christ came to Israel, there were a few. And in England, there were Susanna, Wesley and Samuel and their family and a few others. So, it's possible for a whole population to rot. It's possible for us to learn from each other, accept each other standards, and rot a whole population. That's why I stand and condemn the beer songs and the cigarette songs. And that's why I condemn the glorification of evil men and women who happen to look good. They're made the heroes and heroines of our youth. The result is, we rot a whole generation. It's possible to do that. They did it in Crete. Somebody did it. And so, in Crete there was a population morally so rotten that the only thing to do with them was to turn on them and rebuke them soundly.

Now, when Christianity is taken into a country where there are low moral standards and corruption abroad, the temptation is, when they get converted, to bring their moral standards over into the church. In some places they stand for that and defend it. Certain missionaries say, not of our society, they say they preach the gospel to an old tribal chief with nine wives. They say, we don't interfere with his cultural standards. That's nine wives, that's part of his culture. Concubinage belongs to his culture. Therefore, we're not going to to interfere with his culture. We're just preaching Christ to him. That wasn't Paul's idea. In Japan, some of them say, we know that our Japanese Christians bow to the Shinto shrines, but it's purely their culture. We can't interfere with their culture. Paul did. Paul said, Christianity comes with two things, sound doctrine and sound morals, and I don't believe you're sound until you have both. Therefore, rebuke them sharply. There's only one standard for Christianity, whether it's in the Baliem Valley or in Boston. There is only one standard, whether it's in cultured, sophisticated England or over in Russia. Only one standard, the standard of Christ. We won't bother customs. If they wear their hair long, we let them wear it long. They wear it short, let them wear it short. Whatever kind of clothes they wear, we won't bother that. There are various mores as they call it. Don't bother those. It is none of our business. But when it comes to moral questions, we do bother them. Because if we don't, we're not preaching the Word and we're not carrying out the commission for which we send out our missionaries and preachers.

Cretians are always liars and slow bellies and evil beasts he said, and when they get converted and come into the church, they come in carrying a lot of that with them. He said, rebuke them soundly and sharply, and teach them and exhort them so they give up all that.

Well, when Paul said sound in faith, always remember this, all men orthodox in belief and pure in conduct. That was orthodoxy in Paul's concept. Orthodox in belief and pure in conduct, and the one springs out of the other, and you can't separate the two. And if you only hold an orthodox creed that does not result in a purity of conduct, then your creed isn't orthodox.

So, the ideal is and with this I close. The ideal is not to accept arbitrary moral standards. You shall eat this. You shan't eat this. You shall wear this. You shan't wear this. Those are arbitrary and they are things that perish where they use it. You shall do this this day. You shall not do it that day, perish with the using. Paul said, don't accept those. Read, the second of Colossians. Don't let anybody, anybody put down on you any arbitrary rules at all, but stay by what the Bible says. Let no man judge you in meat or drink or in respect of a holy day or the new moon or the Sabbath which are but a shadow of things to come, for the body is of Christ. Let no man beguile you of your reward and voluntary humility and worshipping of angels intruding into those things which they have not seen, vainly puffed up by their fleshly mind. They're not holding the Head, Jesus Christ, from whom all the body by joints and bands of nourishment minister and knit. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world are ye subject to ordinances? We don't allow anybody to screw down on our Christianity any rules of conduct that aren't in the book. The ideal is accept no arbitrary moral standards, but let the truth purify us.

Now, you are clean through the word which I've spoken unto you. Christ is the truth and Christ is holiness incarnate. And we are under obligation to be a disciple of His in belief and practice, and then worship in spirit and in truth. That's the ideal. So, Paul said, that's the thing to do. Rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith and sound in the faith Paul meant, sound in their beliefs and sound in their conduct. That's wonderful to me.

Right in the middle of a rotten city like Chicago, God can feel around and find some apples that are just as shiny and red-cheeked and sound, all by the wonderful, wonderful keeping power of God. All by the wonderful keeping power of God, we drive their streets, we ride their buses, we work for them, we buy from them, we sell to them. We keep their books. We drive their trucks. We live in the world and Paul said, you can't escape that. But all the time we're with them, we're like a sound apple in the midst of a rotten barrel. We can be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time and never even smell of the world around about us. That's wonderful, isn't it? And within the church of Christ there should be no rot. The church of Christ should be a place where every apple is sound and every Christian is pure. And if they're not Paul said, sharply rebuke them and tell them they've got to be sound in their faith and practice if they are going to be Christians. Amen. All right.