

Titus 1:1-16

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[0 : 00] Titus chapter 1 we read at the 15th verse, unto the pure all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

Now as with every text of scripture there is an initial context here into which Paul is writing and what he is describing, but also of course there is a wider sense in which this principle is applicable.

What Paul is warning Titus against here is those who are particularly of the Judaizing faction amongst the Cretans and who are a danger to the fledgling church there in Crete because they might come amongst them and seem to impress them by their supposed knowledge of what was the right way to do things and what are the rules they should be following and so on.

And he says those who are particularly, verse 10 of the circumcision, the gainsayers whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, simply for what they can get out of, for the gain, for the sustenance they seek to get.

And then there is this proverb, one of themselves, even a prophet of their own said the Cretans are all wee liars, evil beasts, low bellies, well it is quite a damning indictment of an entire nation, but he says this witness is true.

[1 : 27] Well in some cases no doubt it would be true, wherefore rebuke them sharply, that is the gainsayers, those who would seek to subvert the word of God and mislead the young church.

That rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men that turn from the truth.

So this is the context, the danger of the pure teaching of the gospel, the pure teaching of God's word, that which originates from the Lord being mixed and being diluted by that which is simply the inventions of men.

Now already we can see there are plenty of parallels nowadays in the church at large, where there is the danger that what is fashionable, what is the teachings of men, becomes admixed in with that which is the pure word of God.

Unto the pure, all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled.

[2 : 32] And part of the reason Paul is writing this is that he's saying, well they're coming in with fresh rules or regulations or ideas out of their own heads. Oh you shouldn't eat this, you shouldn't touch that, you shouldn't touch that, you shouldn't taste that or handle that and so on.

And in some ways it was seeking to convince the Gentile believers that maybe they weren't quite good enough, maybe they ought to be observing more rules and these inventions of men.

This didn't come from the Lord, it came from men who sought to impose their own ideas onto the truth of God. Rather, to know what the Lord would have us understand, if we think of, go back to Acts 15, where Peter is speaking about the conversion of the Gentiles.

He said, God which knoweth the heart, Acts 15 at verse 8, God which knoweth the heart, bear them witness, that is the Gentiles, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us.

And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Purifying their hearts by faith unto the pure, all things are pure.

[3 : 46] Whatever we receive from the Lord, we can know it is good and blessed by him because it is from him. And we are able to know this if our minds have been purified by faith.

We turn back a couple of pages from that Acts incident. We see the situation from which Peter was speaking. The conversion of Cornelius and his friends in Acts 10, where we would read at verse 15, where it says, The voice spake when the Lord was showing Peter the vision of the sheep that was let down with all the manner of four-footed beasts and unclean creatures and so on.

Rise, Peter, kill and eat. No, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. The voice spake unto him again the second time. What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. If God has pronounced something good, then it is not for men to say, no, no, that is unclean. That is inappropriate. That is unholy. You shouldn't be doing that.

You should be doing this. Especially if it is something which perhaps God has forbidden. Or which he has said, you know, no longer is required or applies.

[5 : 00] Sometimes what they were talking about was what they should and shouldn't eat, as was the case with Peter and the sheep that was let down there in Acts 10. The Lord was seeking to say to him, through the things that were no longer to be forbidden to be eaten or to be tasted, and they'd hear, don't worry about those old rules or regulations.

What I have cleansed, don't call common. And this was to be a picture, an illustration for the bringing in of the Gentiles, who previously the Israelites would have regarded as unclean.

And when it comes to meats and drinks and other things like that, you know, as Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 14, 14 at verse 20, we read, If you're going to offend your conscience because you've kept, you know, yourself from things that you believe are harmful or whatever, if you consider it a fault, then don't do it.

Don't sin against your own conscience and against the Lord. We might take an example nowadays in terms of, say, the consumption of alcohol, of which a moderate, small amount is perfectly biblical and New Testament allowed.

But we all know that some people have real problems with it. Many people wrestle with it and it dominates their lives and has harmed many people in many ways.

[6 : 28] A Christian might, for example, say, well, in order to avoid any giving of offense or any putting of temptation in somebody's way, I won't touch any myself and then I won't be an example that might harm others.

But that is one thing. But for someone then to say, oh, because I won't touch it, nobody should ever touch it, no time, any time, ever, and it's wrong and it's a sin. It's not a sin.

What God has himself sanctioned. Sometimes it may be wiser to steer clear of things that may lead people into temptation. But if it is purely approached and purely received and accepted, then it is of itself a gift of God.

And we're taught that, you know, in the Old Testament, in the Psalms, for example, there's that reference in Psalm 104, you know, the wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.

These are all things the Lord gives. And Paul wrote to Timothy, of course, use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and so on. So that's just an illustration. To the pure, all things are pure.

[7 : 42] It is this blanket idea that man's rules should replace God's rules. Now, that can be a danger both in terms of what we allow and in terms of what we would seek to forbid.

There are the two extremes in which there is the danger of man's rules or man's ideas being imposed upon the word of God. The one is to regard, oh, loads of things as wrong.

You shouldn't do this. You shouldn't do that. You shouldn't do the next thing. In fact, just avoid all these things altogether. And, you know, Paul makes reference to the fact that some people, for example, even said, 1 Timothy chapter 4, verse 3, they were forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from needs which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

They were saying, oh, well, there's so much lasciviousness, so much license in this world, so much impurity. You're better just to stay completely clear of it. This is what gave rise, of course, to the idea in the ancient church in the Middle Ages that those who were seeking to have what they would call holy orders, priests and deacons and so on, that they shouldn't be married at all.

They should be celibate. And, of course, that has given rise to a huge amount of problems in the Roman Catholic Church and in other branches of the church where that has been imposed.

[9 : 05] Some people are called to singleness of life, and the Lord blesses and honours that. Many people are not. The Lord has not said, oh, marriage is wrong, marriage is bad.

Rather, as we read in Hebrews, in chapter 13, you know, marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled. Unto the pure, all things are pure.

That which is received in purity, that which is accepted in purity, that which in which we rejoice in the Lord who gives it in purity. And the Lord has not forbidden something.

The Lord has not prohibited it in his commandments. He has not said, this is wrong, do you plead on that? We should receive and rejoice in, if we are so led to do so, if we are so given that gift or opportunity.

Not everyone is the same. Not everyone is led to the same use of God's gifts or the same situation in life. But rather, if we are to be pure in heart and mind and conscience, then we are guided not by what men may say in the world, but rather by what God reveals in the world.

[10:15] The two extremes are the ones who say everything is wrong. We should just keep ourselves as pure as possible in a little bubble, and ban this, ban that, ban the next thing.

The other extreme is to say, well, you know, God loves us just the way we are, so everything's okay. It doesn't matter no matter what you do. If you're pure in heart, then everything's okay, and you can just regard it all as acceptable.

Now that is not what God says either. God's word gives us clear teaching that some things are prohibited, some things are evil, some things are sin. We are not called to unscrew our heads and leave them on one side to say, oh, we can't concern anything.

To let our minds and our hearts become like the body as it ages. You know, there's that instance that we have in 2 Samuel, Barzillai the Gileadite, when he's coming to accompany David, back across the Jordan, to be restored to his kingship.

And David says, you know, come back with me to Jerusalem, and I'll feed you, I'll look after you.

And Barzillai said unto the king, 2 Samuel, chapter 19, verse 33, the king said, Barzillai said unto the king, how long have I been with that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem?

[11:29] I am this day fourscore years old. It doesn't sound that old nowadays, but in those days it was. Can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink?

Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? Now sometimes, tragically, people allow their soul or their spirit to become like Barzillai's aging body here.

He cannot taste the difference in the food that he eats. He cannot discern musical notes and the sound of singing. He can't hear the voices that speak.

He can't enjoy whatever he has received. He cannot discern between what is good and bad in the sense of what he receives and what his body takes in.

Can I discern between good and evil? Sadly, there are all too many in this world who are incapable of discerning between good and evil. And many in the church, the wider church, cannot discern between good and evil.

[12:35] Because they will put the teachings of men or the fables or commandments of men or the ideas of the world on the same level as the teaching of God.

Unto the pure, all things are pure. That which the Lord has given is to be received in faith and in purity.

All our relationships are to be in purity. As you know, Paul wrote to Timothy, again in chapter 5, verse Timothy, And I think, well, what about his own personal relationship?

If Timothy, and we don't know whether he was, but if Timothy was to enter into the marital state, the Lord would provide a Christian wife for him to be his sole intimate companion in that respect.

It is not necessary that anybody of the opposite gender be viewed in any light other than as mothers, sisters, you know, the widows, and those who were grandmothers in the faith, or mothers in the Lord, or whatever they were simply to be viewed as sisters, mothers, grandmothers, daughters, with all purity.

[14:04] Likewise, the men to be as brothers, as fathers, grandfathers in the faith, as sons in the Lord. All purity. There doesn't have to be this sort of wink, wink, nudge, nudge impurity that the world delights in.

Whereas if anybody makes some innocent remark instantly, a double entendre, an innuendo is read into it, because this is the impurity of the world that reads its own filth into things which are so often simply innocent.

But unto the pure, all things are pure. But unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure. If the world continues in a mindset of unbelief and filth and hatred and so on, that is what it will reflect.

It will see that in everybody. It will see it especially in those who are the followers of Christ. Because their life and witness is, if you like, it's a kind of testimony, a witness against the world.

And so that is not going to be popular. But unto the pure, all things are pure. But unto them that are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure. Even their mind and conscience is defiled.

[15 : 22] And when we turn against Christ, our mind does become defiled. We become determined to defy logic, to defy nature, to defy all the evidence of mathematics or statistics or reason or logic in order to deny the reality of God.

The reality of his claims upon our lives as well. Their conscience is defiled. They will approve, they will rationalize whatever they do in order to make themselves right in their own eyes.

But it's not ourselves we have to convince at the end of the day. It is the perfect and righteous God. And none of us will be able to stand before him and say, well, Lord, I did this, I did that, I did the next thing.

Am I good? We will be justified at his throne of grace depending on whether or not we are redeemed by Christ. Simple.

End of story. Either we are washed and saved by the blood of Christ, his sacrifice upon the cross, or we are not. And if we are not, then all the good deeds and good intentions and all the best that we can do and all the good things we might have said or done or contributed to will not amount to a pile of dust because it is the blood of Christ alone that cleanseth from all sin.

[16 : 48] And how can we be purified by that precious blood, by that precious Saviour, unless we have believed in him? It is that faith which purifieth our souls.

And again, going back to Timothy, you might think, why didn't you just read from Timothy in the first place? Well, it's because it's this verse in Titus. There's the one we want to focus on. But 1 Timothy chapter 1, we see in verse 19, Paul talks about holding faith and a good conscience which some, having put away concerning faith, have made shipwrecked.

If we put away our faith, our consciences will never be clean of anything. We will never be able to, as it says in chapter 3, verse 19, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

Peter, likewise, has the same idea. 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 21 and 22, who by him do believe in God, that raised him, that is Jesus, up from the dead, gave him glory that your faith and hope might be in God, seeing he have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfamed love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart, fervently.

Now, as I've probably mentioned on previous occasions, in those two little verses there with Peter, you've got faith, hope and love all interacting here. Who by him, that is by Christ, by the Holy Ghost, do believe in God.

[18 : 19] Without believing in him, we can't be purified. That raised him up, that is Jesus, from the dead, and gave him glory that your faith and hope might be in God, seeing he have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfamed love.

You've got faith, verse 21, you've got hope, verse 21, of 1 Peter chapter 1, and then you've got the love of the brethren. See that you love one another with a pure heart, fervently.

Don't let your love be, you know, for what you hope to get out of it. Let it be with a pure heart. And how will your heart be purified, your soul be purified? Through faith and obeying the Lord.

The first commandment that we are to do is to love the Lord, our God, with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. We obey that commandment and all else flows from it.

You cannot love a God in whom you do not believe. You cannot be purified by a power which you do not acknowledge. Unto the pure all things are pure.

[19 : 26] Just imagine that if we are purified in spirit and soul, how the world then begins to look to us. Because we see things then through the lens of that purity.

We begin to see the best in everyone. Yes, everyone will have a mix of good and evil and faults and failings and virtues as well. Nobody is wholly good except Christ.

Nobody is wholly bad. We are a mix of good and bad, all of us. But when we look with purity from a purified heart and spirit to the pure, all things are pure.

That's what we pick up on first. We pick up on the purity. We pick up on the good. We see the best in people. We see the best in situations. All things we see under the hand of God, blessed by the mercy of God, with the gifts of God shining in people's lives.

We see the good in people because the good is first in us. Unto the pure all things are pure. But unto them that are defiled and unbelief.

[20 : 34] Nothing is pure. You see, we are affected by what is one of the things I foodstuffs I enjoy eating is peanut butter.

I love it on a sandwich. I had a big jar of peanut butter and it had been emptied out in the glass jar and washed it out, put it in the dishwasher, came out again and if you smelled it, you could still smell the peanut butter on it so that, well, we can't put anything else in that jar until it's been running again because anything you put in there, it's going to begin to smell of the peanut butter even though the jar is clean, even though it's been washed, even though it's been through all the process of the dishwasher and it's come out sparkling clean, you can still smell it.

You can still get the sense whatever goes into that jar is going to be affected by what was in it before. So, in a positive way, whatever comes into contact with us ought to become tainted, if that is the right word, tainted by the godliness that should be in us, the purity that should be in us, which doesn't originate with us.

It originates with the one in whom we trust and believe, that sanctifying spirit of Christ. Now, sanctification, as I'm sure you all know, differs from justification.

The one is a once and for all. Justification is a once and for all work of God. It's the imputing of the righteousness of Christ.

[22 : 06] His death on the cross pays the price of our sin. That's it, done, once and for all. Sanctification is an ongoing process, as the Catechism puts it.

You know, in the one sin is pardoned, in the other it is subdued. And so, sin which is always rising up like weeds, gets weeded out.

The sanctifying process goes on and eventually, as we become purified by his grace, there should be that fresh fragrance, that new scent.

It's no longer the old smell of the old sin that is there. It should be the new, clean fragrance of the purity of Christ in us.

in us. And when we are thus purified within, everything else begins to look different. Everyone else is seen in a different light.

[23 : 06] People are seen, enemies of the gospel are seen not as those who threaten us, but are those to be pitied, who have not Christ, who need to be saved, who will otherwise be hurtling towards a lost eternity.

We mentioned in prayer at the beginning of the service, how the calendar keeps turning. Every monthly meeting we have, it's the first morning, another month, another month, another month. And then before you know it, it's a New Year's May service. And then another year has begun. Now that's, for us, if we are in Christ, that is solemn enough.

For those who are all about Christ, think of the solemnity of that. Think of how the time is running out. Think of how opportunities are getting fewer and fewer.

And we must pity and pray for and see the needs in those of non-Christ. This is the kind of purity, the kind of love that doesn't fear its enemies.

[24 : 14] Perfect love casts it out for you. What can they do to us? At worst, they can kill us. But don't fear them, rather, the Lord says. You know, fear him, Jesus says, who when he has killed the body can cast the soul into hell.

Don't fear the men of this world. Pity them if they are without Christ. Love them for their need. See through the purity Christ gives the good that will be in them, but the need that is in them.

Number two, unto the pure, all things are pure. We should not thereby say, oh, well, all things are pure. You know, it doesn't matter what you take.

You know, the words of men can be pure and good, just like the word of God, and the things that God has pronounced to be sin outright. Oh, we see the best in these things. We recognize that people are doing their best.

No, some things God has pronounced as evil. Some things God has pronounced as sin. And we are not more pure by pretending that they are all right, by pretending that these things don't matter.

[25 : 20] We become rather less pure. We become defiled by these things themselves unless we can see them for what they are. You know, supposing you've been in some horrendous road accident, and the ambulance takes you in the hospital, and there you are, accident, emergency, doctor comes in, and there you are with broken bones sticking out, blood pouring out of the wounds, and your absolute agony, and doctor comes in and says, ah, you're not that right, you're fine, it's okay, we'll just patch this wee bit, I don't want to offend you by saying, oh, you look awful, what are we going to do about this?

And you say, oh, it's okay, it's fine, you just take a painkiller and off you go home. No, that's not what you need. What you need is for someone to recognize how serious your condition is, not pretend it's okay, purity doesn't pretend everything is okay, purity because of where it is looking from, the vantage point that the Lord gives us, the purity that he alone provides, when we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, everything else is dry and tasteless and toxic without him. It means we can discern between what is good and also, what is of the dry barrenness of the world. We can discern between what is of the Lord and what is not.

You know, as you will all know, I can't speak Gaelic. I can do the best to parrot some words and to try and rehearse or go over a couple of lines.

But supposing I could, supposing I had learned it really, I had perfect grammar and I had perfect sentence construction and I could engage in a conversation perfectly.

[27 : 09] Still, a native speaker to whom it was their mother tongue would discern that I was a learner. They would be able to hear the difference.

They could sense it and they know that this guy isn't actually a real native-born Gaelic. He's learned it from us. There's nothing wrong with that.

They can still tell the difference. They can tell the difference in somebody to whom it is natural and somebody who is, for want of a better word, pretending. So likewise, when we are in Christ, we are able to discern between that which is truly of him and that which is a pretense.

There is that which gives it away. There are the little things, there are the things that don't sound right, the phrases that don't seem genuine, there is the expressions that, you know, there's something not right there, there is the barrenness, the hardness, the emptiness where there should be fullness of love, and above all, there is the lack of charity, the lack of love.

You know, though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains and have not love, I'm not charity, I am nothing. Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, though I give my body to be burned, I'm not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

[28 : 27] Unto the pure, all things are pure. If we have Christ, then we see clearly, we see purely, we see the best in those who stand in need, but we recognize also the worst which needs to be addressed.

Those coming out of the train crash of sin need to be medically treated. those coming out of the situation of the world where they have tried everything and found it wanting need the truth addressed to them.

They need to be blessed with someone who will see straight and talk straight and say, this is what you need, this is the treatment that your soul needs. Just like your body would need to be patched up after an accident and it doesn't benefit to say, no, you look great, you're fine, no, never mind. They need help and this world needs help and the help that the Lord has provided for this world is the likes of us. And we think, well, what can we do?

What use are we? We're so helpless, we're so useless, we haven't got any power. It is precisely through such helpless instruments that the Lord demonstrates how powerful he is, that he shows his power, his grace, his mercy, his purity, and because of our weakness and our earthbound clay state, those who are touched, reached by the power of the Lord, they recognise why it can't be him, it can't be her, it can't be me, because there's nothing in me, there's nothing in them, even I can see there's nothing in them.

[30 : 13] This has to be a power beyond us, a power beyond me, a power which gives this purity, this strength, this discernment, to see what is of God and what is merely of the world, what is merely the fables and commandments of men, to the pure, all things are pure, they see all things clearly, when the purity is what the Lord puts into our heart, into our spirit, that is what we view outwardly, that is what we discern, that is what we recognise, if the Lord grants us such growing, ongoing, maturing purity, then that is likewise what he will use to enable us to see how we may use it, how we may seek and see the best in others, see not that which is threatening, that which is lascivious, that which is earthbound and dirty, think rather of Jesus, who when he saw a tax collector, a traitor, a publican, said to him simply follow me, and he did, who when a woman would wash his feet with her tears and anoint them with the oil and perfume and wipe them with her hair and everybody else would say, oh that's a bit dodgy isn't it, you know that's a bit iffy, it's a bit less serious, that way, he saw only purity, he saw only a heartbreaking penitence, he saw a heart that wanted to give him the best that they had, to the pure all things are pure, and in Christ all things are ultimately purified, but without him nothing is pure, nothing is holy, but in him even the likes of us

can be made pure, can be made complete, and through us we pray others also.
Let us pray.