

Titus (Part 3) – Dangerous Minds

Mike Dsane – August 10, 2014

I feel like the only appropriate introduction would be, "Hey, how are we?" I feel like Chandler would be proud that I kept that tradition alive for him. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm Mike Dsane. I'm one of the Groups ministers here at the Flower Mound Campus. Before we get too far, I want to slow down and pause. I want us as the church to pray.

If you've been anywhere near a TV set over the last several days and seen the news, then you've seen what's going on in Iraq with ISIS and Christians being terrorized and having to flee their homes in northern Iraq. If you've been paying attention over the last several weeks, you may have seen what's going on with Israel and Gaza. You may be aware of what's happening in West Africa with the Ebola virus, and you may even be aware of the hurricanes that are bearing down on Hawaii.

So I just want us to pray. I realize a lot of this could be polarizing politically, from how we see the government, how we see military power, but what I want to say before we comment or criticize is the church ought to be praying. I think if we truly believe what we just sang, that he is indeed on the throne, then we find hope and peace and solace in that.

I just want to go before the throne and lift up those situations, those crises we see in our world right now. I'm going to invite you to pray with me. The Lord is not nervous, so he's not going to freak out if we all pray at the same time. I don't want you to listen while I pray; I want you to join in while I pray. I want to invite you to be a part of that. Let's go before the Lord and lift up these situations.

Lord, I want to start with the recognition, the acknowledgement, the confession, that you're good, that you're sovereign, and that you are not surprised. Lord, when I see these situations, when I hear of terrorist attacks on Christian brothers and sisters in Iraq, or when I hear of air strikes and different occurrences in Israel, or when I hear about hurricanes, or even when I hear about the Ebola virus, it induces anxiety in me.

On some levels, it induces rage in me that people would induce terror and harm on children. It induces frustration in me, because I feel helpless to fix it. But Lord, you feel none of those things. Lord, you are sovereign and you are good and you are completely and totally in control of all this. Lord, that's where I find my hope. That's where I find my rest. That's where I rest my prayers: in your sovereignty and your strength.

Lord, though you do things we may not understand and may not be our methods, Lord, we trust that. It's the same thing we see in Mark, chapter 7, where there's a man who cannot hear and cannot speak, and you stick your fingers in his ears and you touch his tongue and spit. Lord, you complete a miracle that doesn't even seem to make sense to us, but when we look back on it, we can say, "But you do all things well."

Lord, I pray that while we are watching this happen in our world... If any one of these things was happening by itself it would be a major world crisis, but four of them at the same time... Lord, though we don't understand what's happening, though we don't understand your timing, though we don't understand your plan, may we look back on this and confess that you do all things well, that you delivered well, that you healed well, that you gave safety well, that you turned back evil and terror well.

Lord, what we sang earlier, I pray you would let that resonate in our hearts. Let hope rise, and let darkness and death and disease and natural disaster be pushed back by the glory of the light in your grace, and let brothers and sisters around the world give you the acclaim, affection, and glory you deserve because you've preserved them, protected them, and shown yourself faithful and true. It's in your name I pray, amen and amen.

Church, I want to challenge us to continue to pray. Again, if we haven't met, I'm Mike. It's good to meet you. If we have met, then it's good to see you again. We have such a good ethic of confession and repentance here I want to start with a little confession. I'm nervous. I *am* nervous because it feels like there are a million eyeballs staring back at me, but more deeply than that, I'm nervous because of the text I'm preaching.

Let me put it this way. Have you ever been in that situation when you have a friend who comes to you and says, "Hey, you should check this out. You should watch this movie, read this book, read this article," or whatever it may be, and then they hand it to you and it's like, "Seventeen Ways to

Get Killer Abs," and you're like, "Do you not think my abs are killer now?" You're like, "Wait a minute. What are you saying about me right now?"

A couple of months ago, Josh Patterson comes to me and says, "Hey, we're doing a Titus series, and we'd like you to teach." I'm like, "Great." He's like, "Titus, chapter 1, verses 10-16." Well, I'm not as spiritual as some of you, so I don't have Titus memorized, so I have no idea what 10-16 is about. I read it, and I'm like, "Wait a minute. This is on false teaching. What are you saying about me?"

Here's the thing. I don't want to be known as the "false teaching guy." Like, Chandler is the explicit gospel guy. Zach Lee is the kingdom of heaven guy. John Piper is the Christian hedonism guy. I don't want to be the false teaching guy. I don't want to be known for that. Like, "Hey, do you know Mike Dsane?"

"No."

"The false teaching guy?"

"Oh yeah, I know Mike!"

I don't want to be that. Worst of all, I don't want to be the illustration to my own message. I don't want you to be like, "For an example of false teaching, go back to August 9 and 10." I don't want to be that. So there are a lot of nerves in this, but I just want to be honest with you. I am excited. I count it a privilege to be able to share the Word of God with you. I'm excited about what we're doing.

If you have your Bibles, go to Titus, chapter 1, verses 10-16. If you don't have a Bible, feel free to take the hardback black one that's in the seats in front of you. That's our gift to you, if you don't own one. If you do have a bunch of them and you're selling them out of the trunk of your car, please stop. I don't think there's a black market for black Bibles here in Texas. If there is, though, let me know. Let me in on it, because I'll help you find some.

I want to give you a little bit of a recap of where we've been, if you haven't been with us previous to this or maybe just don't remember where we've been. A couple of weeks ago, Josh Patterson started us beautifully on the book of Titus. He gave us some of the historical context of Titus. Let me share some of that with you as well.

Titus, Timothy, and Paul had gone to the island of Crete. In going to the island of Crete, they began to establish churches. Then Paul and Timothy left to go to Ephesus, but as they left, they heard rumblings of issues within the church that were causing lack of health and disorder. This letter is written to Titus to put the church into order and to create health within the church.

The thing Paul comes back to again and again is that our gospel belief must precede our gospel behavior. In fact, there *is* no gospel behavior without the gospel belief. He keeps coming back to this idea that sound doctrine will ultimately blend into sound living, and that understanding of the theology of the gospel must come first so we can live that out. In fact, that's how he starts the book.

In verses 1-4, he begins to proclaim the promise from God, who never lies, that he has made manifest through his Son, Jesus Christ. This is something he's going to fulfill for us: the promise of our salvation. After we begin the book there, the thing Paul says to Titus is, "You must set the church in order by electing, appointing, finding elders." Last week, Zach Lee talked with us about what elders are supposed to look like, what those qualifications are.

He started first with, "You have to take care of the little church, your family, before you can lead the big church." One of the things he pressed us on is these are not just qualifications for elders; these are qualifications for believers as a whole. As Paul writes this out, as he describes to Titus what needs to be done, he ends in verse 9 by saying, "That they might cling to the trustworthy testimony, the trustworthy teaching, as it has been taught, and to also rebuke and refute that which is false."

Paul doesn't say that because this is an ethereal problem that may come down the road. He's addressing a clear and present danger, a clear and present challenge, for those who are in Crete right now. I want to read to you starting in verse 10 what that clear and present challenge looks like, and then we will talk about what it looks like historically and what it looks like for us.

"For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.'" I feel like somebody's mother-in-law wrote that. I feel like she was like, "You always come into my house, eat all my food, lie around, and don't help with anything." I just feel like that's what happened. Paul says:

"This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. 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. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work." Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, in my hands I hold your Word. Lord, I don't want to skate past the awesome responsibility it is to proclaim it. The Word in and of itself is sufficient. It is powerful. It is authoritative. I don't want to ignore that, but I want to speak to the power of that. Though you don't need my permission, I just want to say, Lord, do what you will through your Word.

Lord, all throughout Scripture we see the power of your word. When you decided you were going to create the creative order, you spoke that into existence. When the psalmist reflected on the power of your word, he said in Psalm 107:20 he could just send the word and it would heal. It's the same thing with the centurion on the road with Jesus who stopped and said, "You don't even have to come to my house for the member of my household to be well, but if you would just send the word only, he would be made well."

It's the very thing we see when you walked into the situation of Lazarus' death, and you were on the countryside. They rolled back the stone. You didn't go in, and you didn't carry Lazarus out. You didn't unwrap him. You just spoke the words, "Come forth," and Lazarus came forth. Your word was that powerful. Even on the cross, it seemed as if as long as you were talking you were going to be alive, but you had to give death permission to take you and yield your soul by saying, "It is finished."

So Lord, I pray we would stand under the weight and the power of your Word, recognizing its authority, its sufficiency, and its power for us, and that it would shape and guide your people to be more and look more like you. It's to that end I pray, amen and amen.

Paul starts with this idea of contrast when he starts talking about these false teachers. It's almost as if he's detailing, "These are the dangerous minds we're dealing with, and these are the dangerous motives." He lists off three things to characterize them: that they are insubordinate, empty talkers, and deceivers.

This idea of insubordination, of not being submitted to authority, of not being under the authority, seems to be in direct contrast with what he just said in verse 9 that an elder should be. He says an elder should hold to, cling to, the Word as it was taught, the Word in its truth, the Word as it has been taught by the faithful apostles. They cannot deviate from that and do their own thing, but they must be under the authority. The false teachers seem to be under their own authority, trying to commit their own agenda.

The next thing he says is they are empty talkers, or they're giving fashionable nonsense, things that are untrue, things with no substance and no weight. They're deceiving people with that, which seems to be in direct contrast with what he just said about God, who keeps his promises and never lies. Not only does he never lie, but his promises are made manifest, made substantive, through his Son, Jesus Christ.

He is making this contrast between these empty talkers who have no substance, who are deceiving people, who are not under the authority of God and his Word, versus what an elder should look like. He's saying, "First of all, I just want to call out, 'Here is where I see some error.'" In that he says, "Let me not just leave it in the air, but let me describe to you who is doing this. These are people of the circumcision party."

Side note. It doesn't have anything to do with this; it's just a free morsel for you to take home. If circumcision is going on, it's not a party. Obviously he's not talking about fun and enjoyment. What he's talking about is a specific sect of people, Jewish Christians, or Judaizers. Whether it's them exclusively or they are the majority part of those who are teaching these things, he's trying to identify that they are trying to hold on to some regulations, some Old Testament thought processes and ways of trying to make holiness through their own actions, as opposed to trusting Jesus alone. I think it's important that you know what they are doing and who they are.

Then he says they must be silenced. Now in our culture, in 2014, that idea of somebody being silenced probably doesn't sit well with us. In our politically-correct, tolerant, friendly, "Let's go along to get along," "Let's agree to disagree" culture, for Paul to say they must be silenced, what we see when we hear that is Jack Bauer falling down from the ceiling, choking somebody out and making sure they stop talking.

I don't think that's what Paul means. It would be cool if it was, but I think what Paul is saying is that we have to confront error, that we can't just sit there and say we are going to go along and get

along, that we're going to be tolerant and just agree to disagree. Here's the problem with what our culture sees as tolerance. Our culture sees tolerance as lack of truth, but lack of truth is not tolerance; it's ignorance, and if the church won't stand up and proclaim truth, then it's cowardice.

So there is a call for us to confront what is in error. There's a call for us to silence what is untrue. There's a call for us to step up and address what seems to be leading the people of God astray by deception and untruth. We are called to do that and to be faithful to that call. Here's something we have to understand. Hearing me say this, you may be thinking, "But we're called to be gracious."

We are indeed called to be gracious, but I just want to let you know that sometimes grace needs to be confrontational. There are moments when grace has to step up and say, "This is an error. This is untrue. This is unfaithful to the Lord, and instead of allowing you to continue to veer off into a path of destruction, I must remind you of what's right and true. I'm confronting you, but it is out of love." Paul says they do this for shameful gain, that their hope is gaining something for themselves.

Theologians and scholars think what they were doing was trying to build the reputation within the church so the church would stop giving money to missionaries and those who were accomplishing the purposes of God and turn their money toward them. We could probably think of specific examples in our day and age of things we've seen and heard, things that have been broadcasted, where somebody is teaching and it looks like they're doing it for their own monetary benefit or their own personal renown.

I would dare say to us that we can identify false teaching with one simple litmus test. If the epicenter, the source, of the glory goes to the person who's teaching or to the venue it's being taught in instead of Jesus and Jesus alone, then there's something false about that. Oftentimes, when we do our Newcomers class, we walk through the mission of The Village Church, which is, "The Village Church exists to bring glory to God." I stop right there, and I always say, "That should give you peace in your soul to read that we exist to bring glory to God, because if we wanted to bring glory to anybody else, you should run."

So there's this understanding of shameful gain, trying to accrue, trying to bring, trying to draw reputation or money or something to yourself other than ascribing glory to God and God alone. But before we press off and say, "Yeah, we've seen that with those TV preachers or those people who are spewing that nonsense," we may want to pause and talk about us, because I think there are times we do what we do for the gain, the acclaim, the monetary benefit.

Let me just be confessional again. In my heart, when I started in ministry, there was this desperation to be used by God. There was this desire for God to take my voice and use it as he will, to be his currency and that he would spend me as he will. I didn't care where I got to preach. I would preach to three old ladies and a cat if the Lord allowed me to. But somewhere in there it shifted, and it went from going to where I was most needed to where I was most glorified.

I'm going to be confessional with you. It takes me too long to think through, "Lord, are you calling me here because of the need, or are you calling me here because I'm going to get paid?" There is a sinfulness within us that oftentimes does things for shameful gain, and sometimes we don't even recognize it. I just want to pause there and name that, because that's a danger for us. Paul says they are doing this for shameful gain, and it's upsetting families, literally ruining families, turning them on their heads, because they're teaching what they should not teach.

He has listed out their agenda, their motives, their mindset. Next he begins to describe what could be an atmosphere. He says, "One of your prophets, one of your poets, one of the Cretans, has said you are always liars, evil beasts, and lazy gluttons." It's almost as if he's trying to take the blame off of him for saying it by saying, "One of your boys said this about you," but then he agrees with it, so it's just as bad.

Think about that. Why would they say that about the Cretans? Well, here's what you have to know. Cretans were not known for being morally upstanding. They were not known for being the best people in the world. In fact, it was said that if you were to talk like a Cretan you were a liar. They were known for being liars. They were known for spewing things that were untrue to make themselves look better, to glorify themselves, to make them better in the eyes of people. They tended to be liars.

The idea of them being evil beasts... They had a whack moral compass. It was off kilter. Oftentimes, with their moral compass they would see things that were dishonorable as honorable. It was said by Cicero, one of the writers of the day, "Cretans are so depraved in their mentality they think highway robbery is an honorable thing." If they were to be lazy gluttons, no wonder a message for shameful gain could take root in a place where people don't want to do any of the work but they want to overindulge in all of the benefits.

Here's a question that's important for us going forward: *Is Paul talking about just the false prophets?* That makes a lot of sense. If false teachers are liars, you can't trust anything they say. If they are evil beasts, then they have evil motives. If they are lazy gluttons, no wonder they're trying to deceive people for shameful gain. Or is he talking about the culture of Crete as a whole? Either way, there's a stereotype here. The sad thing about stereotypes is they may be offensive but oftentimes they're true.

So Paul is making this broad brushing statement about Crete and about the environment that may foster this, or the environment that is giving birth to this false teaching. Here's what I'm thinking as I'm reading this: "What a terrible Sunday in church." Like, Titus steps up. "Hey, Paul wrote us. He has given us a message." They're like, "What did Paul say?" "He says you're liars and evil beasts and lazy gluttons. I hope you feel affirmed this morning. Amen. Bless you." That would be a bad Sunday. What pastor gets up and says that about his people? But aren't we, though? Aren't we liars?

Let me build that out, because that idea of lying is not just the idea of telling untruth. It's the idea that the lack of truth is beneficial to us compared to the truth. I remember the first time I lied to my parents. It may have not been the first time I lied; it's just the first time I remember it. I was a kindergartner. Here's what I know about kindergartners: they are essentially bobbleheads. Their bodies are smaller than their heads. They have teeth; they're just not next to each other.

I remember we took class pictures. In taking class pictures, you have your own personal picture. Then you have you and another 20 bobbleheads with no teeth. You have that going on. For whatever reason, I was desperate to have that picture. So I took it home and said to my mom, "I want this picture." I think the package was like \$5. She was like, "We can't afford it." Well, being a kindergartner, I don't know about budgets. I just know we got the *TV Guide* every week and she had \$5 in her wallet. I was like, "I know where the \$5 is at. I'll grab it for you. I can make this easy." She was like, "No, we can't have it."

So here was my master plan. I was going to smuggle these contraband pictures in my backpack for as long as it was necessary until people forgot or until I could get away with it. My mom asked me, "Did you take the pictures back?" and I was like, "Yeah." My teacher said, "Is your mom going to purchase those pictures?" "Yeah, she's going to get me the money and I'll bring it." Here's the thing I didn't think about: the invention of the telephone, which allowed them to talk to each other without me being involved.

My teacher calls my mom and says, "Hey, we haven't gotten these pictures back. Did Michael bring them home?" Then it all blew up in my face. Here's what I realized in that: I lied because I thought it was going to get me what I wanted, as opposed to the truth and me not having pictures. Isn't that true of us, that oftentimes we lie because it seems to make the world more convenient or better or it's a quicker path to getting what we want?

We lie in that relationship because we don't want to deal with the difficult conversation. We lie at work because we feel like it's going to get us up the corporate ladder faster than it would otherwise. We lie because it's going to get us that benefit, that convenience, that thing we so desperately need and want, as opposed to abstaining from that because we told the truth and life being a little bit more inconvenient. I think we all battle that urge to rely on the lie rather than relying on the truth, that idea of evil beast.

So while it may have been in the culture, the thing that makes us unconscionable beasts who go after what we want before anything else and have an evil desire on the inside of us, it's not the culture bleeding in; it's the sin nature bleeding out. It's what Jesus says in Mark 7 when he says, "There's nothing on the outside of you, nothing you can eat that can defile you, but it is what is already within you that creates all of these things like malice and sexual immorality and conceit. They come from within, not from without."

Just like the Cretans, we have the propensity to be evil beasts. This idea of being lazy gluttons... Let's just be friends and talk. We're a little lazy. The fact that they make TVs that are curved because it's so difficult to get up and change the angle of your TV so you can see speaks to how lazy we've gotten.

Smart TVs. I'm not hating you if you have a smart TV. If you have a smart TV... Football season is coming up. Invite me over so I can watch it with you. But haven't we gotten a little bit lazy? It's so hard to press the remote control as opposed to speaking to the TV. Like, that's why you had kids...so they could get up and change the channel.

We are lazy. I'm not being hateful; that's just true. And aren't we gluttonous? Don't we want to overindulge off of the benefits, and oftentimes benefits of work we didn't even do? I read an article recently that said my generation is the most narcissistic generation that has ever walked the face of the earth.

Somebody tried to contend that this generation does all types of charitable altruistic-type things, and the research showed that even when my generation does those things, the motivation is that we would receive the benefit of being seen and being known, not because we think that's going to better somebody else's life or it's our duty.

So even in the good things we do, we're gluttonous and trying to get the acclaim and the praise. Paul lays out this idea of, "This is the environment," and I'm fearful this very same environment may be present in our modern day and we might be susceptible to the same teaching. Then he says, **"Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith..."** Can I just tell you that rebuke is loving? I know the word doesn't sound loving when you hear it, but rebuke is loving.

It would be unloving and unfaithful and unjust to not correct error, to not speak into places and situations in people's lives where they have drifted off the truth of God's Word. It would be unfaithful to stay silent. It would be unfaithful to not point out a place where there is brokenness or error. To do that is a good grace from the Lord. For the Lord to give you brothers and sisters around you who love you enough to tell you the truth and give you sight for your own sin is a good grace from God, even in the context that Paul was writing.

If he's saying you should rebuke these false teachers, there's a belief there that if they hear the truth, their hearts and minds will be changed, and they'll come back in line with the Word of God and have a sound doctrine and a sound faith, which will ultimately build to their sound living. That's a good grace for us. Don't reject rebuke. Lean into it and embrace it.

In that he says, "That they would have sound doctrine, as opposed to those who have devoted themselves to Jewish myths and commands of men and turned away from the truth." Let's build that out a little bit as well, because I want you to have a full understanding. That idea of Jewish myths... Paul talks about it a little bit more in detail when he talks about genealogies in Titus 3:9. It's this idea of disputing the historical record, or the record of the Old Testament, and saying, "Well, maybe it's off here. Maybe it should be shifted here. Maybe this is the true story over here."

It's this idea of having a knowledge that's above what the Scripture says or outside of what the Scripture says and leaning on that to be your truth. It's the idea of the commands of men. In that time, Paul writes a similar letter to Timothy in Ephesus, and he says there are these people who are ascribing to an ascetic, this severe self-discipline, this severe self-abstinence from things that are supposed to be unholy.

They were forbidding marriage. They were forbidding certain types of foods or committing themselves to certain rituals, and they were adding these commandments to what has already been done. Here's where the danger lies: they were saying that to be righteous you must, yes, believe in Jesus, but you must also believe these thoughts that are outside or above the Scripture, and you also must do these things.

It's this idea of taking their own self-righteous works and putting them at least on par, if not above, what the gospel is. Let me say this very simply to you. If it's Jesus plus anything, if it's the gospel plus anything, it's no gospel at all. It's a complete and total anti-gospel to think something else needs to be done that we might be saved, that we might be redeemed, that we might be his. It is a complete lie. It's a complete affront to the gospel to say something needs to be added to the equation, as opposed to trusting the work of Jesus and Jesus alone.

Here are some of the dangerous results of that. In verse 16, Paul says that though they profess to know God, their works deny him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work. Literally, what he's saying is their self-made righteousness, their manufactured, man-made attempt of making themselves right before God, while they think that brings them closer to God, is actually a denial of even knowing him.

It's a denial of knowing what he has offered them. It's a denial of knowing what he has given them through the work of the cross. It's a denial of knowing he is the All-Sufficient One, that he is the one who pays the debt, that he is the one who makes us free, that he is the one who redeems our souls. It's a lie in their works to say they know him but think they need to depend on their works to be close to him.

The words that are used here, *detestable* and *disobedient*, are loaded words. In the Old Testament, anytime there's a commentary of God's attitude toward idolatrous practices, of eating unclean food or taking idols and exalting them to a state of deity, it's said to be detestable. These very people who are doing this abstinence from things they are calling detestable, saying that they're trying to be righteous by avoiding those things, are being defined by the thing they're trying to avoid.

Instead of avoiding detestable things, they have become detestable in their nature. This man-made strict obedience, this ascetic, this deep, severe self-discipline, has made them disobedient as opposed to obedient to God. So the very thing they're trying to achieve by their own works, they

have achieved the opposite. They have become disobedient instead of being obedient, and the works they're doing cannot be good, because they're not submitted under a trust and authority to Jesus.

I think there are two dangerous implications of this false teaching, not just for them, but even for us. I think the first one is that this false teaching says something about us that's not true. To think that we could carry the weight of our own righteousness is extremely arrogant. I can see why this teaching would be upsetting and ruining whole households.

There would be some mentality that says, "Because I have ascribed to this teaching, because I have abstained from these foods, because I have believed this extra-biblical, superior biblical knowledge, because I know these things and have made myself righteous, why haven't you made yourself more holy? Why haven't you worked harder? Why haven't you committed more deeply? Why haven't you abstained from more things? Why haven't you reached my level of righteousness?"

There would be this arrogance that would say, "I have done this by my own efforts and my own work. Why haven't you done the same?" The danger is that's not even true. The reality is that attitude will crush you. The idea of having your own righteousness on your shoulders and you're going to hold that up and continue to manufacture and carry that will crush you.

It would be like being on this hamster wheel, where you're trying to run full speed, and the minute you have a misstep, you're going to be falling and stumbling and trying to get back up to full speed. It would be like trying to be on a treadmill and run as fast as you can and ultimately understanding you're getting nowhere. That's untrue of us, and it's a crushing weight we were not meant to carry.

The other dangerous implication is it says something that's not true about God. To say something needs to be added to the work Jesus did, that it was an incomplete, unfinished, insufficient work, is to say something that is untrue about God. It's to say he wasn't rich enough in his mercy and generous enough in his application to cover the debt of my sin.

Maybe a good way to illustrate it would be a fable I've heard about Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great was one of the greatest empire-building military strategists of the ancient world. In fact, his empire was so vast and he was so rich and so resourced that when he died, they were able to divide his empire amongst three different people because of how vast it was.

After a successful campaign, one of his generals came to him and said, "Alexander, I've been faithful for a long time. I've served you faithfully, but I've not made a lot of money, and my daughter is getting married. I would like for you to pay for my daughter's wedding." Every dad in the room with a daughter is like, "Glory. That is a faithful request." Alexander said, "You *have* been faithful. Go to my treasurer. He handles my affairs. He handles my accounts. Tell him the amount of money you need for the wedding, and he'll sign off on it. We'll pay for the wedding."

So this general went to the treasurer and asked for this exorbitant amount of money. To make it tangible, let's just say he asked for a million dollars. Think about how awesome a million-dollar wedding would be. Like Cirque du Soleil hanging from the rafters while they're doing their vows, free Fat Cow for everybody. It would be glorious. (You guys are like, "It's lunchtime. Don't play with the Fat Cow." I know. It's not open today. It's Sunday.)

So he said, "I would like this exorbitant amount," and the treasurer said, "Well, this is Alexander's money, so let me confirm with him that it's okay." In his frustration, he went back to Alexander the Great and said, "You won't believe what that ungrateful, filthy servant of a general asked you for. He dared to ask you for an unreasonable amount of money. No wedding should cost this much money."

Alexander the Great chuckled, which only heightened the frustration of the treasurer. (We know money people. Money is not a game. We're not laughing about this.) He said, "Why would you laugh that he would impose on your kindness, that he would impose on your riches, that he would dare try to take advantage of you and make money for himself and get gain for himself? Why would you laugh at that?" Alexander the Great said, "Give it to him."

"Why would you give him this money? Why would you go ahead and not only allow this...? You should punish him. You should throw him in jail. You should kill him. You should not give him the money. Why would you do this?" Alexander the Great said two things. "For him to ask me for that means he believes I'm rich enough and I'm generous enough to provide it. Give it to him."

Here's the danger of that false teaching: to say something needs to be added to what Christ contributed to our salvation is to dare say he's not rich enough or he's not generous enough to pay the debt of my sin. Here's what I know Scripture says. When he did hang on the cross and he did utter those words, "It is finished..."

Tetelestai was an accounting term to say, "The transaction has been completed, the debt has been paid, the amount has been reconciled. There's nothing that is left to be owed or to be paid for. There's nothing under the table that needs to be taken care of. This has been completely fulfilled. There's nothing else that needs to be added."

It is a lie about God to say that in some way I can add to righteousness, that it wasn't imputed and conferred on me by the work of his Son and his Son alone. To think I need to add something to that is a lie from the pit of hell that is untrue about God. I just want to remind us in this moment that our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and his righteousness. There's nothing we can add to that.

Let us draw encouragement from verse 15, which says, "**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.**" Their minds, their ways of thinking, have been polluted. Their consciences, their moral reasoning, their ability to know right from wrong, has been polluted, contaminated, has gone awry.

Here's what I want you to catch. For the pure, all things are pure, but he doesn't say for the defiled, nothing is pure. He says for the defiled and the unbelieving. I think it's important that we grasp that "and unbelieving." Here is the truth. For those of us who are pure, it's because we have been *made* pure. For those of us who are pure, if we were going to be truthful in this place, lest we talk like Cretans, we would all have to raise our hands and say we were defiled but it was the grace and mercy of Jesus, in which he was both rich and generous, that made us pure.

So if you're under the sound of my voice and hearing this and feeling like, "Look, I know I'm defiled. I know I'm not walking in submission to the Lord. I know I'm walking sinfully," being defiled is not the deal breaker. We've all been that. It's the belief. It's believing and trusting and resting the full weight of your eternal security on the fact that Christ completed it all through his work on the cross, through his righteous life he has now imputed on us.

He lived sinlessly, though we are sinful. He died unjustly, though we justly deserved it. He conferred that upon us, and we rest our hope, our trust, our faith, upon that and that alone. Let that be a weight off your shoulders. Let that be freeing for you. Let me say it this way. I have a friend and a mentor who has said this to me for years. I'm just going to quote it. "You can't skin a catfish before you catch it." That's super country. I apologize. I have never been fishing in my life. I assume that's true, though I've never caught a catfish and tried to skin it.

The idea is you can't clean something you don't possess. So to think for the Lord to possess you you must clean yourself up first doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. That would be analogous to me saying, "I know I have the flu. Let me get well, and then I'm going to go to the doctor." That would be me saying, "I have a ton of cavities. Let me fill these myself, and then I'm going to go to the dentist."

There would be no need. If I could make myself well, I wouldn't need the doctor. If I could make my teeth whole, I wouldn't need the dentist. If I could save my own soul, I wouldn't need Jesus as my Savior. Let me remind you, for those who are believers, or let me inform you for those who are not, the very same grace that justifies you is the grace that will sanctify and mature you.

That is what will make you innocent. That is what will clean you up. That is what will mature you into the fullness of Christ and take you from glory to glory. You may say, "The record of my sin is a laundry list long. The debt I owe I cannot pay." Then you're a prime candidate for the richness and generosity of God. He will cover the debt of your sin. He will finish the transaction. He will take your defiled heart and nature and make you pure.

I want to challenge us. For those of us who are believers in Jesus, I want to be honest. I think we can slowly and subtly drift into this false teaching. I don't think we are espousing Jewish myths or building Old Testament commandments. I don't even think Paul would tell you the law was evil. I think Paul would tell you that to put the law on par with the righteousness of Christ provided through the cross or to put it above that is where we have an issue.

I don't think Paul would say obedience is a bad thing, but if obedience is this effort to earn something from God as opposed to a response to what Christ has already given, that's where we have issue. I want to challenge us as believers. I think we subtly drift into this. It becomes the gospel *and* my political affiliation, the gospel *and* the podcast I download and listen to, the gospel *and* the gifts I exhibit make me more mature and more spiritual than others.

While all of those things are good gifts from the Lord, while all of those things may be signs of obedience or signs of the Spirit's work in your life, they are not things that earn or make you righteous. Only Jesus and the work he did on the cross makes you righteous. So for those of us who are believers, maybe today we slow down and repent and confess to the Lord that we've drifted into and maybe even espoused some of this false teaching that we could add something to what he has already done.

Maybe you're here and, like I said, this is a moment where you realize where you are, and you're saying, "I'm hearing you. I'm hearing what you're saying. You've been yelling at me for like 40 minutes. I hear you. But I'm so defiled and weak." Can I encourage you from Romans 5? While we were still weak, at the right time, in God's timing... This could be your day. This could be the timing, that he's stirring the faith in you, so you respond with repentance and trust. It's a good gift.

For some of us, it's a day of repentance. For others of us, my prayer, my hope, my expectation is it's a day of rejoicing, of coming to the Table and taking off the weight of self-made righteousness and being able to say, "The Lord has provided this. He has given me a free invitation to come to the Table, and now in response to his grace to me, I will commit my life to him in trust and obedience."

That's a good day to rejoice in. I just want to pray for us. I want to pray that the Lord will complete the work he intended with his Word, and then we'll move into a time of remembering, Communion, and worship. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, I am so grateful. I stand here without fear, and I stand here in your favor because of you and you alone. When the Lord looks at me, he does not see my sinfulness. He sees the righteousness you imputed upon me. I'm grateful for that. Lord, this Word has resonated in my heart, because I can easily drift into adding to righteousness some idea or some understanding I have or some practice I complete faithfully that others may not do, and it makes me arrogant.

Lord, I remember the day sitting in a high school youth service where I heard a pastor proclaim that the forgiveness I've received from you I did not deserve and I did not earn, that you initiated that before the foundations of the world and then invited me into a work you already did. Remind us of that.

For those of us who have known and have drifted, remind us of that, and bring us to a place and a heart of repentance. For those who have never known, let it resound in their ears as clear and true, and stir faith in them that they may respond to it. I know you will. I'm grateful for that. It's in your name I pray, amen.