

The Responsibility to Rebuke

Scripture: Titus 1:7–9

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Among many pastors and church leaders today there is a popular rationale that proclaiming truth is the viable *alternative* to rebuking error. Rather than wrestling with false teachers and their heresies, they're content to cover their eyes, plug their ears, and "stay positive" in their teaching.

But there is no either/or when it comes to preaching the truth and confronting error—that's a false, unbiblical dichotomy that contradicts the examples we see throughout Scripture. In his letter to Titus, the apostle Paul made it clear that both duties are fundamental to the work of a church leader:

For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (Titus 1:7–9)

Pacifism has never been a pastoral option in the war for people's souls. Any pastor who teaches faithfully is called both to exhort believers in sound doctrine, and to refute those who oppose sound doctrine.

Pastors have the God-given obligation to cultivate discernment among their congregations. And that discernment is needed to give their people an understanding of the truth necessary to protect them from the ubiquitous error that incessantly assaults them. *Antilegō* (to refute) means literally "to speak against." The Lord's preachers and teachers are to be polemicists against unsound doctrine that goes under the guise of biblical truth.

Not long after Paul himself ministered in Crete, "many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision," were causing trouble and confusion in the churches there (Titus 1:10). They were not to be ignored, much less tolerated, but were to "be silenced because they [were] upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain" (Titus 1:11). They were particularly dangerous because they arose from within the congregations. "They profess to know God," Paul said, "but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed" (Titus 1:16).

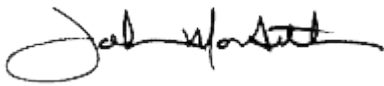
Even the spiritually mature church at Ephesus was not immune to false teaching. "I know that after my departure," Paul warned elders from that church, "savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts 20:29–30).

Although false teachers in the church exist under many guises, they all, in one way or another, contradict biblical truth. They are the enemies of sound doctrine and, therefore, of God and His people. Simply to accept Scripture as the inerrant Word of God does not protect against its being

misunderstood or even perverted. To give personal insights and decisions of church councils authority equal to Scripture is to contradict God's Word—just as surely as is denying the deity of Christ or the historicity of His resurrection. The final warning of Scripture is: "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone *adds to them*, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone *takes away* from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18–19, emphasis added).

The dual role of the godly preacher and teacher is to proclaim and to defend God's Word. In the eyes of the world and, tragically, in the eyes of many genuine but untaught believers, to denounce false doctrine—especially if that doctrine is given under the guise of evangelicalism—is to be unloving, judgmental, and divisive. But compromising Scripture in order to make it more palatable and acceptable, whether to believers or to unbelievers, is not "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). It is speaking falsehood and is the furthest thing from godly love. It is a subtle, deceptive, and dangerous way to contradict God's own Word. The faithful pastor must have no part in it. He himself tolerates, and he teaches his people to tolerate, only sound doctrine.

All Christians share the biblical mandate to cultivate biblical discernment. Remaining passive in the church and ignoring the cancerous effects of false teaching is a serious dereliction of our duty as believers. We are to be equipped with the biblical tools necessary to identify, expose, repudiate, and excommunicate all wolves who sneak into the church. Out of love for Christ, His people, and the pure exclusive gospel that He delivered, each of us must take up arms in the ongoing war for the truth.



(Adapted from [The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Titus](#).)

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