

The world is suffering from **'Trust Deficit Disorder'** according to United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres. If there is a trust deficit, that is because there is a truth deficit. In ancient times people asked, *'What is Truth?'* (John 19:38) In a post-modern world truth is reduced to: *'Be True to Yourself'*. Christians believe in Truth. We follow Jesus who is *'the truth.'* (John 14:6) Jesus begins teaching with *'Truly, Truly'* (John 5:24), not merely to say, *'Believe me, this is true'* but, *'I know this is true, firsthand!'* His name and nature are *'True'*. (Rev 3:14) Christians are often pressured to think their beliefs are outdated and, silenced by fear, they keep quiet about Truth. In the first century Cretans were notorious for disregarding truth. Their own philosopher said, **'All Cretans are liars'** (1:12) Worse, in the Cretan churches there were leaders who didn't care for the truth. *'Christians who are careless about truth are as wrong and foolish and dangerous as the worst skeptic of our time.'* (Os Guinness) **'There are many rebellious people full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group.'** (1:10)

We need to be as careful about truth as 21-year-old air traffic controller Anthonius Gunawan Agung (one of the first casualties of the Sulawesi earthquake) was careful for the safety of passengers on a Batik Air flight after he stayed in the control tower as the earthquake hit, the ceiling collapsing, to make sure that flight could take off safely. Agung then jumped from the tower as it was collapsing, but did not survive.

In his letter to Titus Paul instructed church leaders to *'hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.'* (1:9) God doesn't lie (1:2). God's truth must be held tightly for doctrine is **'sound'**. It is healthy for our soul. Christians are **'nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.'** (1 Timothy 4:6) False teachers must be refuted - **'silenced'** (1:11) **'sharply'** (1:13) - but not by quarreling or arguing (3:9). *'Sharply'* means – abruptly –urgently. It is never safe or right to let lies go unchallenged. Why? If lies permeate God's people they divide and damage the Church - **'disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach'**. These false teachers were motivated by selfish greed- *'for dishonest gain.'* (1:11) In refuting false teaching we for seek the restoration of the false teachers **'so they will be sound in the faith.'** (1:13) We refute error with a heart of truth and love. *What were they teaching? 'Jewish myths'* (1:14) Jewish teachers developed exotic fables around Old Testament genealogies (3:9), turning them into fanciful allegories. Paul calls those stories **'meaningless (empty) talk'** (1:10). Worse was the dangerous **'deception'** (1:10) of **'merely human commands'** (1:14) Paul hints at these commands when he says: **'To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure.'** (1:15) The Jewish teachers (who were legalists) taught that Jesus is not enough and that grace is not effective: that to be accepted by God you must trust in Jesus *and* keep all the Old Testament ceremonial and purity laws.

Their commands were: Be circumcised! Be clean! They insisted on rules that don't redeem and commands that cannot convert! No amount of cutting or cleaning of our body can ever make us right in God's sight. *'These rules have an appearance of wisdom have an appearance of wisdom...they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.'* (Col 2:20-22) Far better **'for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by eating ceremonial foods, which is of no benefit to those who do so.'** (Hebrews 13:9) Because the Cross was not sufficient and God's grace was not enough for the false teachers, their obsession with external purity - relying on rituals and adhering to abstinence from 'unclean' foods which Jesus had declared were 'clean' (Mark 7:19) – cut themselves off from the benefit of Jesus' death which alone is sufficient for the forgiveness of sin. Purity comes through Christ's death which satisfies God's justice and secures our justification (Titus 3:7). The washing that we need which God provides is internal, removing our guilt. **'He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.'** (Titus 3:5-6) The Jewish teachers might wash their extremities, but *'grace, like water, flows to the lowest part'* (Yancey) – to the darkness and the deepest deception of our sin nature. God's grace humbles and heals our hearts. Therefore, **'to the pure, all things are pure'**. Paul doesn't mean that sinful things are pure. He means the things which Scripture permits and what the legalists forbid in their mistaken effort to earn favor with God. This means that Christians whose sins are forgiven are not to be enslaved by rules and rituals in order to be clean. Religion is no longer a rule book. Sins are no longer remembered. But **'to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure.'** The false teachers were enslaved by a "Don't Touch Don't Eat" religion which is not able to make them right in God's sight. And they were wrong about their condition.

In fact their minds and consciences are **corrupted**. They **claim to know God**, but by their **actions they deny him**. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. Titus 1:15-16

They failed the test of the Cross and of Conscience, and Paul would not let them get away with their false beliefs and double standards. They are *'detestable'* (idolatrous), *'disobedient'* (a conscience darkened that it hardly hears the voice of God) and *'unfit'* (adokimos) *for doing anything good'* – like a counterfeit coin below standard weight; a cowardly soldier who fails in battle; and a flawed stone unfit to be used in building.

False teaching always **opposes God's Word** and it **damages and divides** the Church. False teaching always **denies Christ and his cross** as the way to acceptance with God. False teaching trusts in **outward rituals** rather than relying on **inward grace** in Jesus.

*'That's no life for you. You learned Christ! My assumption is that you have paid careful attention to him, been well instructed in the truth precisely as we have it in Jesus...take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside ...working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you.'*

(Ephesians 3:20-21 MSG)