

How to Speak to a Wolf

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Our text today would tell us not to be complacent as we share in this together. We have to realize that there are people who would come and try to disrupt that, that we minister in the name of Christ and we preach the word of God in the midst of a spiritual environment that attracts the opposition of the evil one to what we do and he comes and he disrupts that, most often through men who would try to disrupt what we have just been enjoying. It kind of kindles my protective pastoral spirit as I even think about that here today. You know, Jesus told us in Matthew 7, he said, "Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." Jesus said to be on guard, be aware, don't be complacent, recognize that there are hostile spiritual forces as you seek to live for Christ and be on guard against them.

I want to take you to a few passages that would reinforce this as well so that we would see that this is a common theme in Scripture so that it would cause us to rise up and to protect what God has given us so far at Truth Community. Turn in your Bibles to 2 Peter. This is all by way of introduction. 2 Peter 2. The apostles who wrote the New Testament after Jesus' death and resurrection and ascension into heaven, picked up on the theme that Jesus gave during his earthly ministry. Jesus said, "Beware of the false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves." Well, so many of the New Testament writers repeat that warning. It must be important. It must be a real and serious threat. It's not something to be taken lightly or trivialized. The work of Jesus Christ in a local church is a matter of supreme importance and it's something to be undertaken seriously and earnestly even as we enjoy the ministry of the Spirit in our hearts in such a week as this. 2 Peter 2:1 says, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." Peter says, "This will happen. There will be false teachers among you. Be aware. Be on guard. Don't be complacent. Don't take the ministry of the local church lightly because if you do, wolves will enter in and attack the work of God among you."

Turn over one book to the right to 1 John 4. We saw this passage a few months ago now probably. 1 John 4:1 says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit," don't be gullible, "don't believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many

false prophets have gone out into the world." There again you see it, many false prophets have gone out into the world. They have gone out there, they are continuing there and they are doing the work of the devil as they do. There are many of them. This is not an isolated problem. This is a common threat to the work of God in the local church.

Then turn to the book just before the book of Revelation, the short letter of Jude. So we've seen it from Jesus, we've seen it from Peter, we've seen it from John and we're going to see it from Jude now and notice how Jude instructs us here. This is the word of God to his people. Jude says, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." Why do we need that warning, Jude? I'll tell you why, he says, verse 4, I'm saying this because, "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

We've heard from Peter; we've heard from John; we've heard from Jude. How about the Apostle Paul? Turn back to the book of Acts 20:28, again, this is all by way of introduction to our return to the book of Titus here this morning. "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock." Paul is speaking to the elders at the church of Ephesus. He says, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure 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. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears." All of that would be very sobering and almost frightening except for what Paul goes on to add in verse 32 which is true of us today as well. He says, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

So what are we saying here? What are we looking at? Well there are two things, two sides to it really. One is to realize as we said last week where the sheep gather, the wolves are going to come. Sheep attract wolves. The light attracts the bugs. And so even as we have had such what I believe is such a healthy and good start to our Fellowship over the past 18 months and we have grown numerically and we've grown spiritually and we've grown in God's word and we enjoy the fruit of that right now, it would be foolish for us to take that for granted. It would be foolish for us to assume that there will never be a threat either internal or external to the work that we do. We have to realize that this kind of joyous ministry takes place in the context of a greater spiritual battle and that there will be times where we will have to deal with wolves who are in the midst.

When we talk about wolves, let me be very clear and specific about what I am saying. Today's message, by the way, is titled "How To Speak To A Wolf," and we're going to see how to speak to a wolf here today from Titus 1. But when we talk about wolves, let me be specific so that you don't misunderstand exactly what I am referring to. When we

talk about wolves, we're talking about false teachers. We're not describing people who are confused in the Christian faith. We're not talking about unbelievers who are actively opposed to the gospel, in that sense. We're not talking about new Christians with wrong ideas or Christians that are trying to learn and trying to grow but ask questions and don't quite understand. Those are not wolves. They are people who need ministry. They are people who need help. They are the reason that Paul says that the word of God is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance. We all need to be built up by the word of God. We're all in the process of growing. It's not that we need to grow that would make someone a wolf or we would all be wolves. No, no, a wolf is someone more specific. Jesus said that they come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. When I talk about a wolf here this morning, what we're describing is this: wolves are men, sometimes women although women will not be able to teach from a pulpit at Truth Community, wolves are men who set themselves up as teachers, who are set in their wrong beliefs. They are settled in it and they try to draw others into it and they refuse correction from church leaders. That's a wolf. That is someone categorically different from someone who is trying to grow and understand and is going through difficulties and all of that. No, a wolf is someone who is intentional. He is someone who declares himself, who presents himself as a teacher, as someone who knows what the truth is and what should be taught in a local church. And he's set in his wrong belief. He's considered this over time. He's considered this sometimes over a period of years and he shows up and talks the talk and acts like one of us but inside he's ravenous. He's looking to draw other people under his wrong teaching and when he is confronted with it by church leaders, by the established church leaders of an assembly, he refuses their correction. He thinks he's going to be the one who corrects the church leaders. He actively seeks to promote doctrine which he knows is not welcome within the context of a local body but he's not upfront about it. He does it in subtle ways in order to draw, as Paul said in Acts 20, in order to draw the disciples after himself, seeking to develop his own little following under the umbrella of a church that is seeking to do right by the word of God. Those are wolves. These are men that bring teaching into a local church and undermine the clear teaching of the word of God in a place like this. They would undermine the clear teaching with conflicting, contradictory messages, contradictory doctrine, all the while trying to present themselves as one of us. They dress up like a sheep but their paws are full of claws looking for disciples to devour. God says in his word that those who are following Christ and preaching the word of God must expect this to take place when it happens.

Now, as I said last week, I can honestly tell you with joy in my heart, I am not personally aware of any wolves at Truth Community right now. I'm not. We're not dealing with any issues like that in leadership and I'm very encouraged by that. But at the same time, we can't be complacent about it. Wolves show up and you look out and everybody looks like a sheep and you just don't know and so the question is: how can we guard ourselves? How can we protect ourselves? Beloved, here's what I want you to see as I look out at so many faces that are here so faithfully week after week at Truth Community and I know from the things that you say and from your continued presence that this place is important to you, that Truth Community matters to you and is a place of spiritual importance to you. What I want you to see is that while the elders of the church have a unique

responsibility to deal with wolves as we'll see in the future, we all have a part, we all have a share in this that we should all want to be zealous to protect what the Lord has given us, to not take it for granted. Say, "This is precious to me," and the surest way to undermine it is to give room to people who would teach contradictory doctrine, who would divide that way, who would divide with their teaching. Men who would draw people after themselves who are not recognized, who are not appointed by God or by the leadership to be in that position in the body. How do we protect ourselves from men like that? It's inevitable that they are going to come. What do we do when they show up?

Well, we find in the book of Titus as we continue on, we see very clear instruction from God. Turn to the book of Titus and what I want you to see is that collectively we share in this responsibility and also this prerogative. Yes, yes, that's an important word. We share in the prerogative to protect ourselves from the wolves who will inevitably arise in our midst. Titus 1 is our text for this morning. Titus 1, beginning in verse 10. Paul, we had seen last time, we had an introduction to elder qualifications and it ended on this note in verse 9, Paul is describing how we know if a man is qualified to be an elder and leader in the local church, well one of the marks of men like that is that they hold fast, look at verse 9, "they hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching." They hold to a system of biblical doctrine and they protect it and they know it and they understand it and they can explain it. And, he goes on, so that he, meaning this elder, "he will be a both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." That was his closing mark of the qualifications of a biblical elder. It's that he knows the word of God, he's able to teach it and he can address and refute those who contradict it. It's a high calling. It's a high standard. That's a high responsibility for a man. No man should take on the office of elder lightly in light of the fact that we're responsible for protecting the doctrine of the word of God.

Now, why is that important? Here is where we enter into our text for this morning. Why is it so important for a man to be able to handle the word of God accurately if he's going to be an elder? Why is this warning about wolves so prevalent in the New Testament? Why? Why? Well, you have to understand that the word of God is protecting us from those who would do damage to our souls. The word of God is warning us that we're in the midst of a spiritual battle and that men will come and try to undermine that which we hold dear. Look at verse 10, Paul says the elders have to be able to hold the faithful word because, verse 10, "there are many rebellious men," you see, he's picking up the same thing that we saw in five passages earlier.

10 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, 11 who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. 12 One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." 13 This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.

I love the Bible. I love the New Testament. I love this letter of Titus and one of the reasons that I love it is because Paul here is not writing what we've become so conditioned to in our academic circles in Christianity in the 20th and 21st century. Paul is not writing an abstract philosophy of church ministry here. He is writing in response to an existing problem with real people in real churches that he cared about and he's writing to Titus to help these people. We see that whole families were upset by what was going on. Families who in some ways are just like yours and mine, who were being uprooted and upturned, overturned in the work of these false teachers, these wolves. This wasn't abstract theology to Paul, he was dealing with real life people, real situations that needed immediate, urgent help from spiritual leaders in order to overcome the attack of these wolves that were in their midst. The New Testament is written to address practical issues with practical people, with real people and so we're not reading an abstract dissertation here. Paul had people in his heart that he was looking to protect as he wrote this letter. Wolves were on the march. Wolves were attacking the Christians on the island of Crete. They were upsetting entire families and Paul wrote to Titus so that that assault could be turned back and these people could be restored to their joy and their confidence.

As we read this passage, as we study this passage together this morning we're going to answer two questions in response to it. The first question, if you are taking notes, and I encourage you to take notes so that you can go back and read things later, kind of learned it more on your own. Especially this time in Titus, we're just dealing with matters that just really lay the foundation for everything that we're going to do in the future. There will be times that will come, maybe soon, maybe further off in the distance where we have to deal with a false teacher in our midst. I want you to understand now before the situation arises why we deal with things like we do. You have to understand, you have to realize the biblical pattern that God has given for church leadership to protect the flock from those men who would try to devour them with their wicked motives and their false teachings. So the first question that we're going to answer today out of this passage is: what do we do with wolves? What do we do with wolves? What do we do with them? Some people have maybe this slightly unspoken thought, the expectation that the local church is like a town hall meeting where everyone is welcome to voice their own opinion and that it's okay. You know, we're used to an American democracy and there are competing voices and we see that all the time in politics and in our government and they subconsciously import that into their view of the church. Not true. Absolutely not true. The church has a standard that it upholds and conflicting, contradicting, undermining voices are not meant to be accommodated and given voice in front of the sheep. What do we do with wolves? Paul says, "Silence them." He says, "Silence them."

Look at verse 11 as he's described these rebellious men in verse 10. He said there are many rebellious men, verse 10, skipping over to verse 11, "who must be silenced." What do we do with wolves? We silence them. The word that Paul uses there "to silence them." The word has the idea of causing something to be put on the mouth. It's a causal stem in the original language. To cause something to be put upon the mouth. It has the idea of muzzle them. Muzzle them. Eliminate their influence from the body. Silence

them. Don't let them continue to speak and influence the sheep of God who are being greatly upset by their false teaching. That's what you do with a wolf that manifests himself. When you recognize a wolf in the local church as an elder in the church, elders are responsible to go and silence that influence so that they cannot be divisive, disruptive and destructive on the spiritual lives of those who are under their care. Remember we said a couple of weeks ago that one of the duties of an elder is oversight. One of the duties of a shepherd is to protect the sheep. A shepherd in the first century was especially responsible to protect the sheep from wolves. Paul takes and the Bible takes that metaphor of wolves and literal sheep and applies it and says, "Here's what you do. There are spiritual wolves. You have to protect the sheep. The flock of God that you are responsible to feed and tend, you have to protect them from those spiritual wolves who are out for blood."

So, what do you do with a wolf? You silence them. This is all still part of the same point but I'm going to ask a different question here. If you're going to silence a wolf, you have to be able to spot him. You have to be able to recognize a wolf. You have to know what a wolf looks like so that you can say, "Oh, this is one that I have to address. This is one of those men that Christ warned us about that we have to deal with." Listen, I am very sympathetic to the fact that sometimes this is really difficult to do because one of the marks of a wolf is that he's in sheep's clothing. He may not look dangerous to you. You may not recognize immediately the thought that he's got the warm, fuzzy, full, maybe attractive, even a winsome personality. You cannot, beloved, you cannot, we cannot measure the safety of a man by the winsomeness of his personality. That is one of the quickest ways to be drawn into the jaws of a wolf is to look at things outwardly like that. "Oh, he's so friendly. He's kind of funny. I like being with him." Of course. If he bared his teeth right from the start you would never be drawn to him and so you have to look more carefully. You have to think. You have to be discerning. We as a church, we in leadership, have to know how you can spot a wolf.

Paul here in this passage shows us how to do that so that we can know who it is to be silenced. Look at verse 10 with me again. "There are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision." That's the situation that Paul was addressing but it's a prevailing, it's a repeated problem. These are the ongoing marks of a wolf. Notice first of all in verse 10 that Paul calls attention to their rebellion. He says, "there are many rebellious men." They are insubordinate. They are insubordinate toward leadership. They undermine confidence in the God-appointed authority in a local church. They come in and they undermine that. Sometimes with open assaults like cannons attacking the foundation of a fortress. Sometimes with subtlety like termites just quietly infesting, undermining the strength and the stability of that which the local church is built upon. But you can note a wolf, you can spot a wolf by their insubordinate, rebellious attitude toward church leadership. They think they know better. They undermine. Why do they do that? "You know, what he said there wasn't right at all." A lot of times, not always, but a lot of times you can tell a wolf by, the wolves are often the ones sitting in the back row. Nothing personal to those of you that came in late. But wolves depend on operating in the shadows, quietly whispering, quietly showing the fact that they are in opposition to church leadership. When you start to hear something like that, be on guard.

Say, "Uh-oh, uh-oh now wait just a second. You're kind of new here. Haven't seen you before and I'm hearing strains of rebellion. What are those pearly things coming out? Are those the fangs of a wolf that I see? That I detect? Why this growl from inside you toward the leadership of the local church?" Paul says they are rebellious men. They are insubordinate. When you start to see trends of that, be on guard.

Paul also points out, look at verse 10, "there are many rebellious men, empty talkers." You can spot a wolf by his empty talk. A wolf loves his pet theological issues but ultimately their talk is unprofitable. They have a big tongue but their arms are a little bit too short to reach the plow to help in the work or sometimes their arms are just a little too short to reach the wallet in their back pocket. They want to teach, they have lots of things that they want to say but when it comes to actually being involved in constructive deeds that help people in the life of the body, and actually supporting the pre-existing work that they come upon, you don't find them. They might show up Sunday by Sunday but when it comes to work, they are all talk. Be on guard for people like that. Stop and think. Is this man a doer or is just a speaker? Does he just talk? James said, "Faith without works is dead." You know, just empty talk. They love to talk. They want to teach. They want you to listen to them. They have ten things that they are always ready to talk about but ultimately it just proves to be empty babble. When you really step back and look at it, it's just empty babble usually over something insignificant that they try to magnify into a great issue. Empty talk. Pay attention to that.

In Crete, in the time that Paul was writing, these leaders were people that were obsessed with their Jewish heritage and with Jewish teaching. Look over at chapter 3, verse 9. Paul doesn't really explain in verse 10 what their empty talk was but he expands on it, he comes back to it in chapter 3, verse 9 and he says, "Avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless." Paul isn't any more specific than that but evidently these rebellious men were making a big point about the Old Testament law. They were emphasizing Jewish teaching. Maybe some of the extra biblical things that Jews were known for, there are added rules to the marks of the New Testament, they are teaching about the law. This is an important verse for you to see. 1 Timothy 1, just two books back to the left in your Bible or if you have an iPad, you can scroll up and find 1 Timothy, I suppose. 1 Timothy 1:5. We'll just kind of follow this through for a moment even though I hadn't really planned on doing this. Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:5, "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." There is a spiritual purpose to our mind. We want people to understand the truth. We want them to have a clear conscience that comes from knowing that their sins have been cleansed by the blood of Christ and we want them to be sincere in their devotion and their following of Christ. That's what we're after. That's what we want. Love and and a sincere faith. He said in verse 4, actually let's go up to verse 3. I kind of jumped in the middle of it, Paul is dealing with the same issue again, this issue that we opened with in our introduction. He said, I left you "at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines." "Timothy, you've got to silence these men. You have to silence them. You have to put a stop to what they're doing." Verse 4, "nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration

of God which is by faith." We read verse 5, look at verse 6, "For some men," that's plural, there it is. It's right there. It's right on the surface of the page of the text. How can we miss this? How can we be careless in light of everything the word of God says? "For some men straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions." Don't judge a wolf by whether he seems hesitant or not, wolves are often very confident in their error. They are very forceful and Paul says they are often rooting what they are forceful about in the law of God in the Old Testament. They are forceful about that when they don't really even know what they're talking about. They don't understand the implications of what they're saying and yet they come to you and they speak confidently. Paul looks at Timothy and he says, "Timothy, you've got to stop that. You've got to silence it. You can't let it take further root."

So these men, as we go back to Titus now, turn back to Titus 3:9, going back there for a moment. He says, "Avoid these foolish controversies. Avoid it. Avoid it. Don't get tangled up in it, Titus. Avoid that kind of strife and disputes about the law because all that junk is worthless. It's unprofitable. Don't get messed up in that. Don't waste your time on it. Just silence it and make it go away." That's the instruction. That's how you deal with a wolf. And as you ask, how can you spot a wolf? Their rebellion, their empty talk, Paul goes on and says, "You can also recognize a wolf by what they leave behind. What do they leave in their wake." Look at verse 10 again and you see with a reference to those of the circumcision, that's a reference to people who have Jewish roots. He says, "There are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision." "Watch for the Jews who enter the church," Paul's tells Titus in that circumstance, "watch for those who are prominent in putting forth things from the Old Testament laws binding on believers today. Watch out for those. Watch out for that kind of empty talk. Silence them," he says in verse 11, "who must be silenced." In the Greek you could read it, "it is necessary that they be silenced." This is necessary. It must be done. This is the will of God for those men to be silenced and not have influence in the church for which Christ shed his blood. You can recognize a wolf by what he leaves in his wake.

Why do they have to be silenced? Look at what these teachers were leaving behind them. Paul says, "They must be silenced," verse 11, "because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain." You look at their wake and what their teaching produces. It's not the fruit of the Spirit. What their teaching produces is not love from a pure heart and a sincere faith and a clear conscience. They leave behind anxiety in the hearts of those who were previously content. They leave behind a wake of spiritual disruption, of distorting things, and upsetting people rather than people coming to a closer confidence in Christ and a sure and greater sense of assurance of their salvation, peace with God and peace with men. What these men are leaving behind are people who are upset. You can recognize them by that. They leave conflict in their wake. They seek it out. The rebellious, insubordinate men and the rebellion spills over into the hearts of people who previously were peaceful. When you start to see teachers who are having that kind of impact on people, well step back, call an

elder, call the pastor and say, "You need to know about something. You know what I'm seeing here?" You see, we collectively join in: the pastor, the elders can't see everything that's going on but collectively we all see and we all become eyes and ears to be on guard against this.

One of the marks of wolves, one of the certain marks of a wolf, is that they like to isolate sheep from those who protect them. A common trait of cults is that they will remove people, they try to remove people from their family environments. They will remove them from the local church. Classic, saddest, most horrific case of that was Jonestown in 1978 when Jim Jones took a whole group of people to another country to isolate them and they all ended up, most of them ended up dead by suicide. They isolate sheep from those who protect them. It's not always that dramatic, of course, but a wolf will like to pull you off to the side and whisper discontent to you. They will invite you into their home; they'll introduce teaching that's new and strange to you. You'll say, "I haven't heard this before," and you're away and you're in their environment and they're away from accountability and a wolf isolates a sheep so that he can attack it. Just be aware of it, beloved. I'm saying these things not to scare you but to help you, to protect you. Because this is what the word of God says for us to do, to be aware of and we need to know the way the enemy operates through false teachers so that we can recognize it when it comes and we can silence it before the damage is done. You see, it's serious business. Listen, why are we talking about this? Why are we taking so much time on this? It's because your souls are important. It's because your families matter. It's because we want you to know the joy and peace and love that is in Christ Jesus and the blessing of being a follower of Christ and we realize that there are spiritual forces in the heavenly places, Ephesians 6 says, that tries to attack and undermine all of that. They do it through men who come looking like your friend but just waiting for the time to strike at the jugular in your neck.

So we want to protect each other from that kind of teaching and we realize that a wolf, what makes them so dangerous is that they don't outwardly appear that way. They don't outwardly appear dangerous and so don't fall asleep on the watch. Don't rest when you should be vigilant. Be vigilant. Be careful. Jesus said, "Be on the alert." As much as we love our time together and as much as we enjoy that, we can't take it for granted. When God has given us a gift of a Fellowship like this with so many sweet, tender-hearted people who love the word of God. We love it and we say, "Oh, because we love it, because it's special, we protect it." Many of you know to put valuables in a safe outside the easy mark of a thief. Well, as we talk about wolves, that's what we're saying. We want to put the precious gift of this Fellowship, we want to do everything that we can to make it really hard for a wolf to get there and to get in and to attack it and to undermine it, right? If we have something valuable, we need to protect it. Well, what's the threat? Where does it come from? The threats come from wolves.

Look at the end of verse 11. Somewhere in the midst of the wolves' activity, you'll find a motive. You'll see as you observe, you'll see what they are after. Paul says that they are "teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain." A lot of people in it for the money. Some people in it for the control. Paul said in Acts 20, in the passage that we looked at earlier, they are seeking to draw the disciples after them. You've got a man

teaching certain doctrines who is wanting to get his own following. He can't get it on his own so he'll come into a place where there's already a following and then he'll just try to pick off some sheep that he can pull after himself. Watch out for men like that. This is real. This is a problem. This was true in the first century and it's been true in the church in the intervening 2,000 years. We just can't think that we're exempt from it. If we're wanting to be a gospel preaching, Bible teaching church, we're going to expect this to come. We're going to attract men like that. They can't build their own following so they'll come and try to siphon off some after themselves.

So they are after something other than a pure motive of honoring Christ and seeking to be a blessing to the sheep. They want something from the sheep rather than giving ministry to the sheep. That's the mark of a wolf. That's how you spot a wolf. In Titus' situation, this is kind of almost humorous in a sense. Look at verse 12. Paul, to reinforce his point about the deadliness of these wolves in that first century situation, particularly on the island of Crete, he says this in verse 12, "One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.'" Paul says at the start of verse 13, "This testimony is true." What he's doing there, he's quoting an actual Cretan prophet who lived about 600 years before the time of Christ by the name of Epimindes. He said this and he was a Cretan and he said this about his own people. 600 years prior to the time that Paul was writing, looking at his own people, he said, "They are liars. They are evil beasts and they are lazy gluttons." Going back to what Paul said, "they are empty talkers. They are lazy and they don't work and you can't trust them." The Greek language actually has a verb that in English it would be to cretize. They made a verb out of the noun of a Cretan to indicate someone who was a liar and an untrustworthy man. That's how bad the situation was. It became part of the Greek language, these people were so bad. Paul says, "This is true. This is the national character in which you are ministering, Titus, and these false prophets, these wolves, not only are doing this in spiritual motives, this is embedded in their national character. So this is a testimony to what that guy said 600 years ago and it remains true today." Their own people recognized that they were like this and what he's doing is, he's alerting Titus, he's saying, "Titus, this is a deep rooted problem. This isn't superficial. This is a profoundly deep problem and you have to be prepared to meet it with force in order to protect the sheep." He says, "This has no place in the church of Jesus Christ, these wolves." You don't let wolves run free in a sheep pen. You stop them. Stop them right where they're at.

What do you do with the wolves? You silence them. Second question for this morning that we're going to answer in the time that we have remaining: how do we silence them? How do we silence them? We're going to answer that question biblically. Those of you with concealed carry, it has nothing to do with that. We're not going to take him out physically although sometimes that's a temptation, I admit. No, no, Paul says you have to silence them. In verse 11, "How do you silence them, Paul? This is pretty weighty stuff. These are men with a lot of tradition and there's a lot of things going on and it's the national character. What we do? How do we do this, Paul? How do we silence them?" Look at the rest of verse 13, he says, "This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth." What Paul is saying here is he

says, "You have to reprove. You have to rebuke. You have to reprimand these false teachers severely so that error and disunity cannot take root in the church. You rebuke them severely." When a man has been identified as a wolf, you don't try to win him over and accommodate him. You have to confront his error directly and sharply so that the issue is clear and there can be no mistake about where the truth lies and where the error lies. There can be no room for misunderstanding that that kind of an approach that a wolf has no place moving about in the flock of Christ. That's the responsibility of elders to go and to rebuke a man like that so that his influence cannot fester, so that it can't take root.

What does severity look like? Well, in this day of modern, flabby tolerance where everybody has their own truth and we're all conditioned to that more than we probably realize, we need to take a biblical look at what severity looks like because it's not what our culture would condition us to say. We're told to let everything go. All manner of perversity is fair game. You know, "You have your truth and I have mine. Let's coexist," as the bumper sticker says. You don't know how many times I've nearly gotten into rear end accidents when I've seen that and wanted to accelerate just to take that bumper out. What does severity look like? Well, what I want you to see is that when the Bible talks about severity in this that it uses severe language. Look back at how Jesus spoke in Matthew 23 when he was addressing and rebuking the Pharisees. In showing you these passages that we're about to look at, I'm not proposing an exact script to quote but I want you to see the depth of the severity of the rebuke that is given to false teachers. Look at Matthew 23:13. Jesus is addressing the Pharisees. Again, interestingly those with Jewish ties and Jewish regulations and Jewish traditions, that they tried to bind on men. Jesus says, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." Look at verse 15, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.' You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold?"

Look at the way he addresses them: you fools, you hypocrites, you blind guides, you sons of hell. This is sharp, breathtaking language that, follow me here, that is fitting to address an agent of the devil who is leading people into eternal destruction. This kind of sharp language is necessary to define the issue, to frame it. One of the great failures of Christian scholarship today is the tendency to want to dance with each other and as you read reviews of books that are absolutely heretical, they'll start out routinely, this is their boilerplate, they'll spend six paragraphs talking about what is good in the book before they get around to saying, "Now I differ with the esteemed scholar on the fact that, you know, Jesus shed his blood as a sacrifice for our sins." Are you kidding me? You're going to commend the guy who is preaching a false gospel just to ingratiate yourself for academic reasons? That is not the biblical pattern, beloved, and it is a shame. It is a mark of disgrace on Christian scholarship that they've drifted into that kind of mealy-mouthed rebuke when Paul says, "Rebuke wolves sharply." The fact that you're in scholarship doesn't excuse you from the biblical responsibility to be the one who protects the sheep.

If you're a Christian scholar, act like one. If it sounds like I've had personal experience with that by my tone, well, there's a reason. That's for another time.

Look, beloved, look, this is serious. This matters. This is the purity of the gospel. These are the sheep for whom Christ died that are at stake. We can't pretend like a wolf is maybe okay, may be rehabilitated. We can't accommodate him and give him respectful greetings in the marketplace. We have to make the issue clear because there are individuals, there are families behind this interchange who are going to be affected and influenced by what is said, by the way this interaction takes place. Unless you rebuke them and say, "You have no place in the church of Christ," they are not going to go away on their own. They're like the ducks that get in our pool right now, day by day, and it's a major pain but these ducks are incredibly persistent. I chase them away. I throw things at them. I chase them with a rake and do you know what? I go back in my office and I look out and I look across and there they are, just kind of waddling over, going back to the pool again.

That's the way false teachers operate in the church. If you don't deal with them severely, they're going to come back and they're just going to try to stay and deposit their filth all around. So we have to be diligent and, beloved, we make no apologies for the fact that as a church, we're not going to give quarter, we're not going to give wolves room when they come to be known. Paul says to reprove them severely. What did Paul have in mind? Well, we can maybe see it in his own words. Look over at Philippians 3. And the thing with the ducks is maybe a little more instructive than I think as you think about it. You know, you look at those ducks and looking at them from a distance and they're kind of cute and they just waddle around and they wouldn't hurt a thing but oh, are they a pain. Oh, are they messy. Oh, do they disrupt things. Well, magnify that exponentially and you have the problem of false teachers introduced to you. Paul says in Philippians 3 and notice this, notice his language at the end of verse 1. He says, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you." You see, he's writing and he says, "I'm mindful of the fact that I need to provide a safeguard for you." Why is a safeguard on his mind? Well, he goes right into it in verse 2 with a very sharp contrast, he says, "Beware of the dog's, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision." He calls them dogs and evil workers right after he said, "I'm trying to protect you. Watch out for the dogs and these evil workers that are around." You see, he's speaking with those two voices where he's speaking gently to the flock and he's flaring out words of warning and rebuke of a most severe kind to those who would try to attack those sheep that he's responsible to protect. All I want you to see, the only reason I took you to Matthew 23 and Philippians 3, was for you to see the level of severity that Jesus and the Apostle Paul used in addressing false teachers. I could have multiplied examples from other places but didn't for the sake of time.

Beloved, this is not done with an angry spirit. We're not angry, we're vigilant, we're protective. It's a reprimand with unmistakable clarity so that the issues can't be missed and if they refuse to listen, what do you do? You send them away. That's what you do. Look at Titus 3. You send them away. Titus 3:10, right after Paul said, "Avoid these disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. It's a distraction to real

ministry. Don't waste your time on this." Verse 10, "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned." There is your sense of severity. There is your sense of urgency that Paul has. Reject him. Speak to him once, speak to him again and if he continues in his insubordination, if he continues in his rebellion and says, "I will teach what I want to teach," you send him away and as you send him away, you can know in your mind that that man is perverted and is sinning and his actions and his words condemn him. His own actions and words condemn him and you send him away. You don't give him room to devastate a flock. That's how you deal with a wolf. That's how you speak to them. You speak to them sharply. You speak to them clearly. You make it clear. They have an opportunity to respond. They say no. You say, "Look, we're serious." "No." It's time to go. That's the biblical pattern. That's the way that it's done.

Now with that in mind, go back to Titus 1:13 as we wrap this up now. There are multiple pronouns that are at work here in verse 13 and I think Paul is using pronouns to address two different groups here. I'm not dogmatic on this but this is what makes sense to me as I read the passage in its overall context. Paul says, "For this reason reprove them severely." Reprove who? Obviously, reprove the false teachers. Reprove the wolves severely, "so that they may be sound in the faith." Now, it's possible to take that and to say that he's looking to reclaim the false teachers so that the false teachers could be sound in the faith. I don't think that's the best way to read this passage. I think the "they" that will be sound in the faith that he's referring to are their families from verse 11 that are totally upset and undermined by the false teaching. "Titus, rebuke these false teachers soundly so that the flock that is confused can be sound in the faith." He goes on and says in verse 14, "so that they," meaning the families, meaning the innocent believers would, "not pay attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth." You see, he isolates out the men who are turning away from the truth. Those are the ones who are rebuked in verse 13. In the middle there he says so that they, so that the innocent believers could be sound in the faith and that they would turn away from those men who were trying to lead them astray. Rebuke the false teachers so that others don't follow them and do it with clarity and do it with severity because the issues at stake are so great.

You see, beloved, remember that the whole context of this, look back at chapter 1:5, Paul said, "I want you to appoint elders who hold fast the faithful words so that they could deal with these false teachers, so that they could help the families that are upset by what's going on around them." You see, beloved, this is my final point here: elders in a local church, their responsibility, their first priority is to protect the sheep. Elders are not supposed to be worried about protecting the feelings of the wolf. We protect the sheep as elders. Spiritual leaders protect the sheep, they protect the flock for whom Christ shed his blood. Jesus said to Peter in John 21, "Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. Watch over my lambs." That's what elders are responsible to do, to protect the lambs and when a wolf shows up, you don't give the same tender care to the wolf that you give to the lambs. The wolf is trying to hurt your charge of protection. So you go after that wolf and you say, "No, not here. You'll have to find another place to ply your wares, to sell your potions. Not here. Not in this place where qualified elders hold the word of God and seek to

protect the flock of Christ shed his blood for." That's the responsibility of elders. We have the joy, we have the privilege from God to be able to talk about all of these things in advance.

Let me just kind of wrap it up and close it with this: if in time you find that there's a spiritual conflict at work that's taking place, that the elders are dealing with somebody over spiritual, doctrinal, theological issues within the walls of Truth Community Fellowship, understand now in principle so that you'll recognize it in practice that when that comes, that's not a sign that the elders are failing in their job or that somehow something has gone wrong. That kind of spiritual conflict that is engaged is a sign that your elders will be doing their job. They will be doing the protection that God calls them to do and so you look at that you say, "Oh, there is conflict. There's something wrong." No, you look at it and you assess it completely differently as a result of what we've seen here today. "There is conflict. We were supposed to expect this. Scripture told us to expect this and here it is and our elders are dealing with it. I'm going to get on my knees and I'm going to pray that God would bless their efforts and sustain them as they deal with that difficult task." You see, elders who take this protecting function seriously are an umbrella of protection to the flock of God. It's not that they are being unkind to wolves, it's that they're being faithful to the word of God and faithful to the sheep who are their charge from the Lord. So they deal with wolves and they drive them away because an elder says in effect, "Not on my watch. I'll spill my blood before a wolf gets to my sheep." That's what elders do.

So whether we're doing it as a congregation or as men who will be called to leadership in the future, beloved, let's understand this: let's be faithful to defend the truth that God has deposited to us in the Scriptures and let's be faithful to each other. Let's be faithful to one another and realize that the sweetness of the Fellowship that was so beautifully symbolized in the music that Jeremy brought to us before this message, to recognize that the peaceful serenity of that is something that we will protect and if we see wolves in our midst, will collectively join together and rather than expose ourselves to harm, we'll do what the Lord tells us to do: spot them, speak to them severely and send them on their way if they don't repent. As we do that, we will provide an environment in which we can worship in Spirit and in truth and we will provide an environment that we trust in years to come other believers yet to be born again, your own children, your own children, your own flesh and blood, would be able to come and find spiritual shelter and hear the truth taught unhindered by those wolves who would seek to undermine it. That is a glorious call for us to do and let's seek the Lord's grace now as we recognize that from his word.

Let's pray together.

Before I close in prayer, let me just say this, to those of you, maybe some young people here from Christian families: if you have never repented of sin and turned to Christ for salvation, today is the day that you should do so. Right now. We've seen from Scripture that the world is full of false teachers who would lure you away and into eternal destruction. If you don't know Christ, you are vulnerable to their attacks even if you don't recognize that right now. Flee to Christ. Turn to him for salvation and entrust your soul to

him and you'll find that he is a faithful Shepherd who will care for your soul throughout all of eternity.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are such a Savior to us that you redeemed us with your own blood, that you gave yourself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for yourself a people for your own possession, zealous for good deeds. Lord, we want to be a people like that. We realize that we minister to one another graciously through the ups and downs of life but we also realize that there will be times where it requires the engagement of a conflict with someone who would undermine the work. Father, give us discernment as we go forward to know the true sheep from the true wolves because outwardly they may look the same to us. Give us discernment. Help us to spot them early on before they have opportunity to do damage. Raise up in this church elders who are fit for that task and ready to engage it for the sake of service to you to protect those that would be under their care.

Father, for all of us, let us see the urgency of knowing truth and not being gullible and realizing that the church is a place for purity, not for men of mixed motives and contradictory teaching. Help this place now and for years and decades to come, our Father, when another man stands in this pulpit and expounds the truth long after I'm gone. Father, let this pulpit of Truth Community be a place where your word is heard with clarity and that is a place where the light shines because your word is open and it gives light to all.

Father, we ask you for these things. We are so thankful for what you have done in our midst. We thank you for the joy of sharing life together around your word. Father, we do remember those who are sorrowing deeply today and we just ask for your special measure of comfort upon them. Father, that the tears of this past week would be the means that you somehow turn into shouts of joy in the days to come, that comes from the work of your Spirit bringing such comfort and grace and peace that it's tangibly evident and they say in the midst of it, "Oh, the sorrow was so great but I know the comfort of the Lord in this and that's why I can sing." Father, give them grace to that end.

Father, as Andrew said earlier, spoken and unspoken, known and unknown, Father, this is a room full of broken hearts in one way or another and so we ask, Father, for the true ministry of your Spirit upon our lives that would sanctify us to greater holiness, that would comfort us in our sorrow and that would equip us to live for Christ and to be faithful in this place in the years to come. We pray these things in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

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