

## **“Never Trust a Cretan!”**

### **Stereotypes and the Bible**

Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (James 7:24).

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:1, 2).

[Jesus said] “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies ”(John 8:44).

“You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman (Genesis 3:4).

#### **Titus 1**

**1 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, <sup>2</sup> in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began <sup>3</sup> and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior;**

**<sup>4</sup> To Titus, my true child in a common faith:**

Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

**<sup>5</sup> This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— <sup>6</sup> if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup> For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup> He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as**

taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

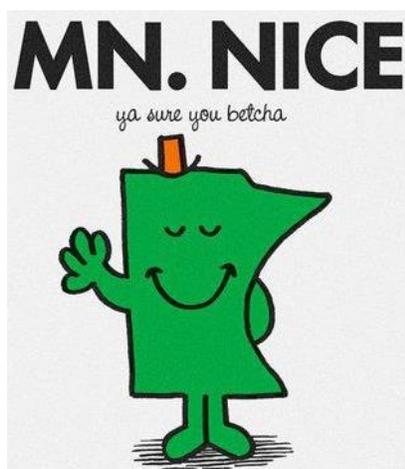
**<sup>10</sup>For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party.** <sup>11</sup> They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach.

**<sup>12</sup>One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."** <sup>13</sup> This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, <sup>14</sup> not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.

Was Paul guilty of being prejudice? (We'll come back to that later!)

**"Stereotypes have some truth to them"** has some truth to it but not in the way people think. That truth is not about the stereotyped but the stereotyper.

Stereotypes are kept alive by confirmation bias: We notice the few examples that fit the stereotype and overlook the ton of examples that do not. You look for what you want to see and believe!



### Minnesota Stereotypes

(Please note that I am not in any way making light of the tragic death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. As far as I'm concerned, George was murdered).

Ole, Lena Sven and Lars are fictional characters that show up in many Scandinavian Americans stories and jokes. Here is a story that reflects the stereotypes of Scandinavian Americans!

Ole is a member of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in Icicle, MN.

His friend, Sven, is a member of the Swedish Lutheran Church in Icicle, MN., which is next door!

One day the two friends are pounding a sign into the ground that says:



Da End is near!

Tur Yerself around now before its too later

A driver in a speeding car yells out saying: **“Leave us alone, you religious nuts!”**

A moment later, you hear the sound of screeching tires and a big splash!

Ole turns to Sven and asked: “Do ya tink maybe da sign shoud yust say Bridge out?”

<sup>12</sup> **One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.”** <sup>13</sup> **This testimony is true.** Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, <sup>14</sup> not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth (Titus 1:12-14).

## Is there any truth to stereotypes?

Stereotypes, while not always 100% accurate, are there for a reason. Because of our family, ethnic, educational, religious, and national backgrounds, we are all subject to certain tendencies.

The events of this past week seem to indicate that although we live in a culture that rejects any kind of general characterization of people based on stereotypes, such thinking is still prevalent today!

the apostle Paul seems to see value in speaking about them, not for the purpose of mockery, but in order that we might properly assess ourselves.

## Crete & Cretans

The island of Crete was the home of two great empires: the Minoans and Mycenaeans. In Greek mythology, the island was the birthplace of Zeus, Artemis and Apollo.

However, Crete has had a long reputation of being a home of liars!

The Roman poet Ovid referred to Crete as "mendax Creta" *Lying Crete!*

The Greeks created a verb, "cretizeas" which was a synonym for a lie!

Unfortunately, Cretan society has been known for its long history of family and clan vendettas, the same way the island of Sicily has become the stereotype of "Italian gangsters in America."

Perhaps "lying" was an accepted behavior in that society.

Was Paul right to accept and pass on this stereotype?

(Some say that Paul's worker, Titus was a Cretan!)

Here is what one commentator said about this troubling passage:

*At first sight, this expression seems to be a racist slur; a careful reading of the Letter to Titus will show that Paul employs the saying not to degrade the Cretan race but to emphasize his desire that the members of the church on Crete remain steadfast and true in refuting the false teachers and opposing the rebellious among them.*

Paul was a sinner just as you and I are sinners.

At this time, he was Paul - not St. Paul!

I believe that Paul is showing his human side. He states in fact this stereotype. I also believe that Paul was convinced that the Gospel could free Cretans from the trait of lying.

Notice that this section is part of a chapter in which Paul is trying to list the characteristics of leadership!

Being a liar has no place, as far as Paul is concerned, for one serving in a leadership role in the church.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD. "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him (Leviticus 19:16-19).

## **South Pacific**

In the original Broadway production of South Pacific, there is a song that has often been removed. It is entitled, "You've Got to Be Carefully Taught!"

This song is sung by Lieutenant Cable, with the line "[Racism] is not born in you! It happens after you're born."

[Verse 1]

You've got to be taught to hate and fear  
You've got to be taught from year to year  
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear  
You've got to be carefully taught

[Verse 2]

You've got to be taught to be afraid  
Of people whose eyes are oddly made  
And people whose skin is a diff'rent shade  
You've got to be carefully taught

[Verse 3]

You've got to be taught before it's too late  
Before you are six or seven or eight  
To hate all the people your relatives hate  
You've got to be carefully taught

### A Final Thought!

While it might be hard for some of us to understand fully the hurt of stereotypes, many of us had relatives who did experience stereotypes here in America.

If you had "German" relatives in America during World War I, they had to deal with the stereotype of being associated with the enemy, **the Huns**, Germany!

In World War II, the United States was at war with Germany again. A stereotype name at that time was

**"Jerrys."** "Jerry is an English slang for chamber pot which English people thought looked a lot like the German army helmet!

