

The Danger Of False Teaching

Introduction. Scripture clearly affirms that God is truth and that He speaks only truth and cannot lie (John 14:6; 17:17). Scripture also affirms that Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). His very nature is to lie and deceive.

God's own people have never escaped the plague of falsehood. False prophets were the bane of ancient Israel and false teachers have been the bane of the church. Satan attempts to obliterate God's truth with his own falsehood. He attempts to keep the fallen world in spiritual darkness and to confuse and discourage God's people.

As a young man probably in his mid-thirties, Timothy had been asked by Paul to work with the church in Ephesus and to correct some of the problems mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament (Acts 20:28-30). Timothy was charged multiple times to stay the course against ungodly teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-4, 18-19; 4:1-2, 6; 6:3-4, 20-21; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 3:1-7; 4:1-3). Paul outlined the danger of false teaching in 2 Timothy 2:14-19, and it is my hope that we will give it our fullest attention.

I. ***It Ruins The Hearers***

- A. The most obvious harm of false teaching is the damage it does to its hearers. It puts an obstacle in the way of unbelievers who may be turned away from the way of salvation.
- B. The word "subverting" or "ruin" came from the word in the original language which means "catastrophe". False teaching has a catastrophic effect because it overturns or overthrows faith. Instead of building up the hearers, it tears them down; instead of bringing enrichment, it brings disaster.

II. ***It Brings Shame On The Teachers***

- A. "Study" or "be diligent" is a zealous persistence in accomplishing a particular objective. A diligent teacher and Christian gives maximum effort to impart God's truth as completely, clearly, and unambiguously as possible. He gives unreserved commitment to excellence in examining, interpreting, explaining, and applying God's word.
- B. The purpose of the diligent and selfless teacher is to please God (1 Thessalonians 2:1-4). On the other hand, a teacher who propagates falsehood should be ashamed (1 John 2:28).
- C. "Handling accurately" means literally "to cut straight". It was used of a craftsman cutting a straight line, of a farmer plowing a straight furrow, of a mason setting a straight line of bricks, or of workmen building a straight road. Metaphorically, it was used of carefully performing any

task. Every single aspect of God's truth must be handled accurately -- it is a sacred trust by those who teach it and by those who hear it.

III. ***It Leads To Ungodliness***

- A. Words of worldly human opinion are no more than evil chatter. Paul is not talking of idle chitchat or gossip -- he is speaking of destructive heresy that perverts divine truth and will lead to more ungodliness (cf. Titus 3:9).
- B. Hebrews 2:1 suggests that apostasy happens in a very gradual manner. Sudden changes are too noticeable. In any apostasy, there are four stages which occur:
 - 1. Change the thinking of the people through preaching.
 - a) This does not necessarily mean that lessons are full of "fluff." Preachers can simply refuse to preach all of the truth. Hard sermons may be preached on topics that everyone agrees upon, such as abortion, but nothing else said.
 - b) There may be plenty of lessons on first principles, the home, and living a Christian life, but lessons on authority, false doctrines, and current trends are no longer preached. This will change the people because it will change the heart (Matthew 15:19).
 - 2. Talk about new ideas that are meant to place doubt.
 - a) Questions can be asked such as, "What would be wrong with ... ?" or "Do you think our arguments against ... were good arguments?"
 - b) These questions are simply meant to raise doubt in the minds of the members. It does not matter if I am wrong or right, I am just trying to put doubt in your mind. Too much preaching today raises questions rather than answers questions.
 - 3. Slowly introduce questionable practices that lead to apostasy.
 - a) This may start with practices that you just cannot quite put your finger on what is wrong with them.
 - b) Anyone who questions these practices will immediately be labeled as a "brotherhood watchdog" or be accused of "trying to run the brotherhood".
 - 4. Introduce the full-blown innovation.
 - a) There is a zero percent chance that this congregation will have a choir within the next year, but you get a preacher who is willing to carry the congregation through these stages and in 30 years, you will have a choir.
 - b) Earl West's *The Search For The Ancient Order* traces the development of and split over instrumental music in the 1840s and it followed this exact pattern.

- C. It only takes one generation to make a change and another generation to admit the change and take it further!

IV. ***It Spreads Rapidly***

- A. In the ancient world, the term *gangraina* was used of cancer as well as gangrene, both of which diseases spread rapidly and are deadly. False teaching and satanic lies spread faster than the truth, because the sinful human heart is more receptive to them.
- B. Religious deceptions are so infectious, malicious, and insidious that they are to be handled with great care (Zechariah 3:1-2; Jude 23). This is more than a friendly disagreement or a complacency to see the Bible differently.
- C. It is because false teachers are of the world and serve the prince of this world that they are so dangerous. Rapidly growing technology has helped worldliness and every other form of ungodliness to also grow more rapidly, exposing more people to more evil teaching than those who lived even a few generations ago could have imagined.

V. ***It Upsets The Faith Of Some***

- A. Because he was listed in a previous letter, Hymenaeus persisted in his efforts to mislead brethren, and Philetus had replaced Alexander as his co-conspirator (cf. 1 Timothy 1:20).
- B. To deny or distort the truth about the resurrection is to deny and distort the heart of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:13-15, 17). It is therefore a tragic and damnable heresy to teach falsehood about that doctrine.
- C. False teaching in issues such as divorce and remarriage, Romans 14, fellowship, the A.D. 70 doctrine, the deity of Christ, hell as an annihilation, and expanded women's roles can all lead to sin and overthrow the faith of some.
- D. Not only does it blaspheme God and denigrate His word, but one of the greatest perils of a false gospel is that it keeps some souls -- over the centuries, countless millions -- out of the kingdom.

VI. ***It Reveals Those Who Do Not Belong To The Lord***

- A. Unlike those who trust and follow in falsehood, those who are genuine disciples of Jesus Christ are part of the firm foundation of God.
- B. This foundation is the Lord's church, which stands firm despite the waywardness of some of its members (1 Timothy 3:15).
- C. God's seal of ownership is on the church in two ways. First, we have the divine assurance that God knows those who are His. Second, we have the divine charge to keep ourselves pure by abstaining from iniquity or wickedness in the form of false doctrine.

Conclusion. President Bush said on 10/9/03, "Wars are won on the offensive." It is terribly misguided to say that we do not need preaching which identifies, exposes, and condemns sin. You do not defeat false doctrine by just letting it fester.

There are members of the church who would say that we do not need any more lessons on issues and problems. They would say, "That's not the kind of preaching we need." They would insist on preaching about the grace of God, the love of Jesus, and getting along with brethren.

We do need those lessons, but we also need lessons that help us to stay away from false doctrine. You can criticize that kind of preaching if you want, but it is what God wants, and we had better remember our obligation to demand and uphold that kind of preaching.