

Instructions About False Teachers

1 Timothy 6:3-5

Introduction

The chapter includes instructions towards masters and slaves (vv.1-2); instructions about false teachers (vv.3-5); and later about money and godliness (vv.6-19). Paul wants Timothy to keep both the ministry and its message pure! Paul now returns to the subject of false teachers for the third time (see 1:3-11; 4:1-5). Paul warns Timothy that false teachers embrace a different doctrine; speculate about useless information rather than focus on godly edification. False teachers place fruitless and empty discussion above love and personal ambition above truth. The false teachers abandon sound teaching for false teaching (v.3); the false teacher is proud (v.4); obsessed or preoccupied with controversy (v.4); providing evidence for a corrupt mind; a kind of truth deficit disorder (v.5); which results in a toxic spiritual character disorder. False teachers often use their positions for extravagant financial enrichment and equate wealth with godliness (v.5b). Timothy is told to steer clear of these charlatans (*from such withdraw yourself v.5b*).

Why worry about what people teach? Shouldn't we be more concerned about unity and a united witness to a watching world? **Paul refutes the lie that doctrine doesn't matter. People who reject sound (read healthy) doctrine will embrace unsound or unhealthy or untrue teaching.**

The false teacher has to be identified and dealt with. Paul warned the Church at Ephesus years before in Acts 20:28-31; “. . . *take heed (be on guard be warned) to yourselves and to 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. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*”

Paul knows Timothy will face severe trials and tests; he exhorts and commands to teach these things (v.2); later Paul points out that the man of God is known by what he flees from (v.11); follows after (v.11) and fights for (v.12) and is faithful to (vv.13-14). The key to the success of the ministry leader can be found in the perfections that are in Christ Jesus; in the Gospel and the instructions found in the Scriptures (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The False Teacher's False Doctrine (v.3)

1 Timothy 6:3–5 (NKJV) 3If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness,

We ignore Paul's words at our own peril. “If anyone teaches otherwise.” Anyone is capable of becoming a false teacher. Anyone is capable of leading others astray. Tragically false teachers can make meaningful and lasting spiritual contributions only to abandon wholesome words even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the doctrine which accords with godliness.

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What makes a false teacher a false teacher? The false teacher teaches a different doctrine (*heterodidaskalei*). In short order Paul identifies three characteristics of false teachers **by the content of their teaching.**

1. **The false teacher promotes and defends false teaching.**
2. **The false teacher abandons sound instructions from the Lord Jesus and the Bible's revelation.**
3. **The false teacher disagrees with godly teaching.**

Paul uses an interesting word to describe the false teacher's motives. The false teacher does not consent (*proserchomai*) which carries the idea to approach and attach oneself (Daniel Guthrie; *The Pastoral Epistles*; p. 110). In this case 'connect' or 'attach' to wholesome words; even to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the doctrine which accords with godliness. The word wholesome (*hygiانو*)—speaks of health—wellness—and is regularly translated 'sound' (1:10). In one sense the medical term is being used as a metaphor to describe spiritual wellness. The teachings of Jesus should lead to wholesome, healthy beliefs and behaviors!

The false teacher does not simply teach false doctrine. The false teacher must disconnect from the healthy teachings of Jesus and the New Testament writers that promote righteous beliefs and behaviors.

What does this mean? The false teacher will eventually deny the identity of Jesus because they deny the words and message of Jesus. The false teacher denies the righteousness revealed in Christ and is unwilling to separate himself or herself from the world (that is the worldview that rejects God's Messiah) or the flesh (that is all that the flesh desires apart from Christ). It would appear that one or both of these things are the reason the false teacher does not submit or commit to the wholesome words of Jesus Christ but rather introduces unwholesome doctrine to justify their false teachings and or perverse way of life.

In the beginning of this letter (1:3-4) Paul wrote; "*As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.*" Look again at verse 3; "teaches otherwise" and "no other doctrine" are the same Greek phrase. **Any teaching that denies the essentials of Christ and the gospel is suspect. Paul enlarges the idea of false doctrine to include the specific instructions of Jesus and the doctrines that leads to godly living.**

The teachings of Paul and Jesus do not contradict one another. Neither Paul nor Jesus taught that Christians are free to act out sexually in unhealthy ways that violate the clear boundaries of appropriate behavior.

"Any teaching different from the sound instruction of the gospel of Christ is false teaching. The Greek word for "sound" could be translated "healthy". Such instruction is life giving. Some

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commentators believe that at least one of the Gospels (perhaps Luke) may have already been in circulation, allowing believers access to “sound instruction” in written form. In any case, those teachings had been preserved orally and constantly taught to believers” (see Life Application Bible Commentary; 1&2 Timothy and Titus; p. 118).

What is Paul’s concern? The false teacher teaches something different than what Jesus taught or the Apostles taught and demonstrated in their lives! **The false teacher’s error is rooted and grounded in the false teachers unwillingness to agree with Jesus or a willingness to discount or dismiss Jesus.**

The false teacher not only breaks with orthodoxy (right belief) but breaks with orthopraxy (right behavior).

Paul does not paint a picture of a person who unintentionally misses the point on a minor matter; but rather a person who gets the most basic and fundamentals of the faith wrong. C.S. Lewis wrote; “Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God because He said so.” J.N.D. Anderson wrote; “He said that he was in existence before Abraham and that he was ‘Lord’ of the Sabbath; he claimed to forgive sins; he continually identified himself, in his work, his person and his glory, with the one he termed his heavenly Father; he accepted men’s worship; and he said that he was to be the judge of men at the last day, and that their eternal destiny would depend on their attitude to him.”

Who else made these extravagant claims? No one. Martin Luther said, “Anything that one imagines of God apart from Christ is only useless thinking and vain idolatry.”

The false teacher questions and then breaks with the revelation of the Bible concerning Jesus; the gospel and salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. The false teacher then invents their own narrative to suit themselves. The false teacher’s **opinion becomes equal with Scripture or even exceeds the authority of the Scripture. The false teacher will promote and present a false view of God, and then a false view of Jesus and then a false view of salvation.**

The False Teacher’s Toxic Character (vv.4a-5a)

*4he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,
5useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth,*

The false teacher often appears confident and knowledgeable. Paul says the false teacher is “. . . *proud knowing nothing*”. These are strong words—and the false teacher might be tempted to add harsh and unkind words. Paul refuses to flatter the false teacher or compromise his position. Paul told Timothy that Timothy’s motive in teaching must be “love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith” (see 1 Timothy 1:5). The true teacher; **love**

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from a pure heart; a good conscience and sincere faith. The false teacher; pride—an absence of understanding; obsessions with controversies and arguments over words. The false teacher is bloated with an ever increasing admiration of his own self-importance. The false teacher is proud—conceited. Their conceit is proof positive they know nothing. Remember in chapter 1:7 the false teachers desperately desired the title **teacher of the law**—but were without understanding. Since the false teachers teach what is contrary to the Scripture; to Christ and the gospel they must draw conclusions that are not worthy—unworthy—which must of necessity generate envy and strife, reviling and evil suspicions. The false teacher is caught up in a parade of endless controversies, disputes, myths, endless genealogies (1:4); meaningless talk (1:6); all things that promote speculation, endless arguments about ideas that have no Biblical basis but come either from demons or the disturbing minds of the false teachers.

The word *obsessed* is interesting for several reasons (*noseo—here only in the Greek NT*). *The KJV uses the term doting*. It literally means to be sick—in classical Greek it was used metaphorically to describe mental illness. Thayer (Greek scholar) believed in this context it meant to be taken with a morbid fascination or interest in a subject that it constituted what might be termed a disease. Other scholars say “a morbid craving” or “his disease is intellectual curiosity about trifles”. The false teacher has an intense (read sick) preoccupation with controversy, disputes, arguments over words. Once again the original language uses a compound; *logos-machias (only here in the Greek NT)*. *Battles—wars—a war of words or a war over words*. *The NASB translates this “He has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words*.

This is not the careful scholarship or precision required for careful study—this is an attempt to justify bad doctrine that gives ground for bad behavior. **The false teacher loves to split hairs and split churches.** We are passionate about the truth. And in all fairness sometimes a careful examination of the truth leads to controversies. When arrogance or anger provide the fuel for discussion than little good can come from the conversation.

The false teacher shuns clarity and celebrates ambiguity. The false teacher likes to distort what the Bible makes clear. **And what does the Bible make clear? What is essential Christianity?** These are the main and plain things. What does the Bible say about the nature and character of God? These are the teachings (doctrines) about God, Jesus, The Holy Spirit; the nature of man, the doctrines of salvation; the church, the scriptures; angels and demons and Satan and their ultimate destinies.

Jesus warns about majoring on minor issues and minoring on major issues. “Blind guides, who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also” (Matthew 23:24-25).

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The exact definition of the gospel is given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. . . He was buried, and He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures”*.

The Bible is clear about the nature of God, the identity and mission of Jesus and the message of the gospel and the need for all men to be saved.

What is it that the false teacher is asking you to swallow?

Paul describes their teachings as useless wranglings—the origin of which lies with men of corrupt minds destitute of the truth (5a). What happens when people preoccupy themselves with empty questions and the meaning of words? All these things lead to envy, strife, reviling, and evil suspicions.

Drama. Turmoil. The false teachers make it a point to elevate their revelations or intellect over The Word of God. The false teachers false teaching further infects, pollutes and corrupts what little cognitive powers that remain. **The people are deprived of the truth (destitute).**

Deprivation triggers images of emaciation; when a person is deprived of food, or water or sleep a healthy body can quickly deteriorate. What happens when the soul and spirit are deprived of truth and given ever increasing doses of toxic teaching?

False teachers deprive people of the truth. Since they can't tolerate the truth or the gospel of truth they are left with their own imaginations and deceptive practices. **What happens when people are starved of the truth? They can no longer tolerate light and their growing comfort with darkness insists on darkness.**

Paul knows the truth. The evidence of sin in the life of the false teacher is the evidence of a lack of love and the absence of the Lord Jesus in their lives.

What happens when men embrace darkness and reject the light? What happens when men are led away from the light, away from Christ, away from grace, away from truth?

The False Teacher's Perverse Preoccupation With Profit (v.5b)

5b. . .who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

Prosperity gospel. Godliness is a means of gain. Why wouldn't God want you rich?

Does wealth produce godliness or holiness? Does wealth produce Christ-like character? It could be that the false teachers are not only willing to abandon sound Biblical doctrine but are also willing to embrace the view that Christ is the means to a different end altogether. The false teacher is not interested in giving you what you need; but giving you what you want.

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Christ without a cross.

The gospel is designed to give us what we need. Death to sin. A new life in Christ. Forgiveness of sin. Hope. A right relationship with God through Christ.

The false teacher loves darkness. Dim the doctrinal lights. The person who is determined to live an immoral life, or a self-centered life, or a self-indulgent life—will flee the Bible, the gospel, the truth. One of the major reasons for rejecting Christ and the gospel is Christ's command to repent from sin and turn to God. The gospel reveals sin and insists on repentance from sin. But the Bible says men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

Why does Paul counsel withdrawal from such men?

Because these men are predators. And you are the prey. Titus 3:10-11; *“Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, (11) knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned”*.

Withdraw. Reject. False teachers divide people, families and churches. Most false teachers do not want to abandon the happy hunting grounds of healthy churches. They will pretend to honor church leaders and honor the Bible. But they will find a way to create drama, promote controversy and all the while claiming they are the ones exercising biblical discernment.

The divisive person creates factions, splits and divisions in the body of Christ. The divisive person is denied membership in the church after he or she has been warned two times. John Flavel wrote; “By entertaining strange persons, men sometimes entertain angels unawares: but by entertaining of strange (read foreign) doctrines, many have entertained devils unawares.”

Conclusion

When are Christians most vulnerable to the twisted versions of Christ and Christianity offered by false teachers? When we are young. Immature. New to the faith. When we are ignorant or unfamiliar with the essential teachings of Christ and Christianity. Like babies who are willing to put anything in their mouth that might be food; new Christians do not always have filters to know what is right—and what is almost right. Why are we counseled to avoid false teachers?

1. False teachers are deceptive.
2. False teachers are dangerous.
3. False teachers are divisive.
4. False teachers give people what they want instead of what they need.
5. False teachers are not innocent.
6. False teachers cannot tolerate the Gospel of Grace for long.

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Remember their goal is to change your mind about God, Jesus, salvation by grace and the gospel. Once you change your mind you are free to live for yourself, or them or their false views. The false teacher must present a false gospel with a false Christ and a false salvation. **The false teacher leaves an uncertain hope. The person trapped in a cult often wonders what else must I do to make God happy or assure my salvation? The false teacher often offers himself or herself as the authority of last resort.**

Since the Bible is the source of truth the false teacher will often insist whatever value the Bible has must be read through the lens of their superior understanding. The false teacher will introduce doubt or disagreement and then offer a substitute of their own. The false teacher will often offer secrets not contained in the Bible and available only to their followers. With a false view of God, and a false view of Jesus, and a false view of salvation—the false teacher invites their follower to a false way of living (that is they are free to remain in their sin).