

The Pathology of False Teachers

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:3–5

Code: 54-45

INTRODUCTION

In this passage Paul used medical terminology to describe false teachers, so I've entitled it "The Pathology of False Teachers." Pathology is the study of the nature and course of disease. False teaching is a deadly disease, and it has an observable pathology. The apostle Paul describes that pathology in 1 Timothy 6:3-5. Paul had already warned Timothy about false teaching in 1 Timothy 1:3-7, 18-20; and 4:1-5, and would say more about it in 6:20-21.

First Timothy 6:3-5 describes the internal deviations from spiritual normalcy that characterize false teachers. The pathological characteristics Paul laid out are not unknown to us, but we need to be reminded of them.

One of the duties every pastor, Bible teacher, or spiritual leader has is warning others of error. It isn't enough to be positive and help people see the good side of everything. Warnings run throughout the Old and New Testaments because God knows His people can be led astray by false teaching if they aren't properly prepared for it. Also false teaching victimizes those who have never embraced the truth because they come under the illusion that they have found it. We are thus reminded of the danger of false teaching.

LESSON

I. THE MARK OF FALSE TEACHERS (v. 3)

A. The Difference in Their Teaching

Verse 3 begins, "If any man teach otherwise." That's the first pathological characteristic of false teaching: it is teaching different. But different from what?

1. The revealed truth

First Timothy 6:2 says, "These things teach and exhort." That refers to everything Paul had taught in this epistle. In chapter 1 he spoke about a proper understanding of the law of God, the saving gospel, and the majesty of God. In chapter 2 he spoke on praying for the lost and on the role of women in the church. In chapter 3 he described what elders and deacons are to be like. In chapter 4 he taught about the source of false doctrine and gave principles for an effective ministry. In chapter 5 he instructed Timothy about how believers should treat older men, older women (particularly widows), and younger widows. Then he discussed how to treat the elders of the church. In the first two verses of chapter 6 he discussed how a slave should serve both a believing and unbelieving master. Paul wanted Timothy to teach the congregation to obey all those things because they were God's revealed truth.

2. The subversive element

So in verse 3 when Paul says, "If anyone teaches otherwise," he means anything that is different from what has been revealed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Scripture.a) In the Ephesian church

We have already seen that men had infiltrated the church teaching bizarre fables, endless genealogies, and other things that weren't edifying (1:4). They wanted to be teachers of the law but didn't understand what they were teaching (1:7). They were teaching doctrines spawned by seducing spirits (4:1). They were hypocritical liars (4:2). They were teaching people to abstain from things that God put no such restrictions on (4:3). They were teaching "profane and vain babblings, and

oppositions of knowledge falsely so called" (6:20).b) In every churchSo when Paul said, "If any man teach otherwise," he knew they already were doing so. Since he didn't mention any specific teacher or teaching, we can conclude this is a generic statement embracing all subversive doctrines and agents of Satan, infiltrating the church to infect people with their deadly virus.False teachers were rampant in the ancient world. From the beginning, Satan, the father of lies (John 8:44), rebelled against God and began teaching lies. Since then he has been spawning other liars to attack God's truth. Whether facing the false prophets of the Old Testament or the false teachers of the New, the people of God have had to continually do battle against lies and errors. Any church, pastor, or Christian who is not aware of that has his head in the sand. Our Lord said false Christs would come. And Scripture is replete with such warnings (see pp. xx-xx).

B. The Tests of Their Teaching

1. What they affirm (v. 3a)

"If any man teach otherwise."a) Revealing their errorYou have to listen to what they say. Is it different from what you know Scripture says? The Greek word translated "teach otherwise" is heteros didaskalia, a heterodox teaching rather than an orthodox teaching. That means it's heresy-- something that's different from what Scripture teaches. They don't get their teaching from the Word of God--they use something other than the Bible. They may base their teaching on some vision, some revelation, some psychological insight, some self-generated doctrine, or some interpretation contrary to Scripture.b) Recognizing their errorSince false teachers are marked by teachings that differ from Scripture, we can spot these carriers of spiritual virus and deadly infection by knowing Scripture. First John 2:14 speaks of those who know Scripture as young men, saying, "Ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."When I began my pastorate at Grace Community Church, two verses set the course for my ministry.(1) Acts 20:27-- Paul said, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." For three years he spent his time night and day going from house to house publicly, and in the meetings of the church on the Lord's Day, teaching the Word and warning the people (v. 31). In verses 29-30 he says why: "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Then he said, "I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up" (v. 32). The only way we can be protected against error is to know truth. False teachers will bring destructive heresies (2 Pet. 2:1) and teach hypocritical lies (1 Tim. 4:1). Those who recognize them are those who know the Word of God. The primary task of the shepherd is to feed the sheep a proper diet so they won't be tempted by the noxious, deadly weeds that grow on the fringes of their pasture.(2) Ephesians 4:11-14--God has given to the church "apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive." We are to know the Word so that we might be able to discern error.Ephesians 6:17 says to take "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." A believer must have the sword to be able to defend himself against the attacks of Satan. In 1 Timothy 4:6 Paul says that a good minister will be "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine." In verse 16 he adds, "Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee." When you and your people know good doctrine, you're protected from the deadly virus of error. The only antibiotic we have against false teaching is the truth of God. Paul reiterated the same truth in his second epistle to Timothy: "Hold fast the form of sound words That good thing which was committed unto thee keep" (1:13-14). "The things that thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others

also" (2:2). "Preach the word For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine but, after their own lusts, shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (4:2- 3). False teachers are marked by heresy. They affirm things that are different from what Scripture says. They even add things to Scripture.

2. What they deny (v. 3b)

"If any man ... consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ." The verb translated "consent not" is in the present tense: the false teacher is not presently in agreement with Scripture. Specifically, they disagree with the "wholesome words of ... our Lord Jesus Christ." That does not simply refer to what Jesus said in the gospels, but to all He has said as the author of Scripture. Colossians 3:16 calls Scripture "the word of Christ" and 1 Thessalonians 1:8 and 2 Thessalonians 3:1 calls it "the word of our Lord." Second Thessalonians 3:1 calls it "the Word of the Lord." Scripture provides wholesome, healthy teaching. Peter said, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that ye may grow by it" (1 Pet. 2:2). But false teachers don't heed the life-message that comes from our Lord because they're not committed to Scripture. They may talk about Jesus and God, but the heart of their ministry will not be the Word of God. They will add to it and take away from it.

3. What they produce (v. 3c)

"If any man ... consent not ... to the doctrine which is according to [related to] godliness." The ultimate test of a doctrine is whether it produces godliness. Since false teachers ignore God's word they don't have godly life-styles. Only the Word of God produces healthy spiritual behavior. That's why 1 Timothy 4:7 says, "Exercise thyself rather unto godliness." Error can never produce godliness. The term "godliness" speaks of reverence, piety, and Christlikeness. False teaching, heresy, and error cannot produce those virtues. Only the truth of God can.

a) An examination of false teachers (1) Conduct The life-style of false teachers is telling. In Matthew 7:16 Jesus says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." Take a look at their conduct. Do they take pleasure in wickedness? Are they lewd, (2 Pet. 2:10)? Are they prideful? Are they concerned with prestige, power, and popularity? Are they self-centered and self-indulgent? Such characteristics are not produced by truth but by lies. (2) Creed Listen to what false teachers say. Are they calling their people to repentance and holiness? Are they urging people to abandon their self-indulgence and be broken over their sin? Or are they teaching doctrines that accommodates the carnal mind and feed the fallenness of man? b) A description of false teachers

(1) By Peter Second Peter 2 describes their godlessness in vivid terms: they "indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires" (v. 10, NASB). They are daring and self-willed (v. 10). "They count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you, having eyes full of adultery and that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children" (vv. 13-14, NASB). "They entice by fleshly desires, by sensuality" (v. 18, NASB). "It has happened to them according to the true proverb, 'A dog returns to its own vomit,' and, 'A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire' (v. 22, NASB). (2) By Jude Jude said they are "ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness" (v. 4, NASB). They "defile the flesh" caring only for themselves (vv. 8, 12, NASB). Their own shame billows the waves of the sea (v. 13).

II. THE ATTITUDE OF FALSE TEACHERS (v. 4a)

"He is proud."

False teachers are marked by an attitude of pride. The Greek word translated "proud" (tuphoomai--also used in 1 Tim. 3:6) speaks of being engulfed in smoke. Here the perfect passive form is used, which means they're in a settled state of being engulfed in their own smoke.

False teachers are invariably arrogant. When someone claims his teaching is superior to the Word of God, that is the epitome of arrogance. An arrogant person is inflated with his own sense of self-importance. Peter says false teachers are so arrogant, "they do not tremble when they revile angelic

majesties" (2 Peter 2:10, NASB). Rather, they speak "out arrogant words of vanity" (NASB). Jude says they reject authority (v. 8) and speak arrogantly (v. 16). Anyone who puts his teaching above the Word of God is arrogant. False teachers refuse to accept the straightforward truth of God. They may try to pass themselves off as humble, meek, and self-effacing, but it is the height of arrogance to affirm things contrary to the Word of God. Should we expect any less with Satan as our example? In his arrogance he chose to be greater than God, and as a result has spawned a generation of sinners with the same desire? For example, Simon, the sorcerer, purposed that he was great person (Acts 8:9). People who are inflated with their own sense of self-importance are nothing more than deviants revealing the pathology of their virus.

III. THE MENTALITY OF FALSE TEACHERS (v. 4b)

A. In Principle

"Knowing nothing."

It doesn't matter how many Ph.D.'s or how much training such people have; they still don't know anything (1 Tim. 1:7). But they are inflated over what they think they know. They parade their imagined intelligence, scholarship, superior understanding, deeper insights, and religious acumen, but the truth is they are ignorant.

1. Characterized

In 1 Corinthians 3:19 Paul says, "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." False teachers don't have insight into any matter of spiritual truth. They have wisdom that is not from above, but that which is earthly, sensual, and demoniacal (James 3:15). They may claim to have some new truth or insight, but they don't. The Lord has chosen to hide "these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11:25). God has hidden His truth from the self-promoting minds of this world and given it to those who believe His Word.

2. Classified

a) By Peter Second Peter describes their ignorance in strong terms. Verse 12 says false teachers are "unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge" (v. 12; NASB). Verse 17 calls them springs without water--they promise to quench your thirst but are as dry as a sandpit. b) By Jude Jude says they are "clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars" (vv. 12-13 NASB).

B. In Practice

"Doting about questions and disputes of words."

The Greek text could be translated this way: "Having a sick craving for questions and word battles." They have a disease--a morbid preoccupation with useless questions and word battles. They make a fuss about terminology. The Greek word translated "questions" (z[ma]et[ma]esis, means "idle speculations." It is nothing more than pseudo-intellectual theorizing. They make a fuss about theory instead of the truth of God's Word. So much is written about Scripture from a liberal or neo-orthodox viewpoint. It's easy to get lost in all the verbiage and speculation. Yet all you need to do is accept the plain truth of God's Word.

They also get into "disputes of words" (Gk., logomachia, "word battles"). They battle each other over terminology. Their minds know nothing, so they engage themselves in battles over semantics that won't get anywhere.

IV. THE EFFECTS OF FALSE TEACHERS (vv. 4c, 5a)

"Of which cometh envy, strife, railings, evil suspicions, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds." Godliness is the ultimate test of truth. But there's a second one: unity. That which unites believers is a common commitment to the truth.

A. The Perversion of Unity

False teachers teach their own thing--whatever is right in their own eyes. They will either add their material to Scripture, or they will deny Scripture in favor of what they teach. Because each ego-motivated doctrine becomes their own particular standard, they became pitted against each other. And that results in discord and chaos. When students go to schools that teach false doctrine, or sit under that kind of teaching, they became confused because there's no uniformity among error.

B. The Path of Discord

1. Envy

Jealousy is inward discontent over someone else's popularity and prosperity. One teacher teaches one false doctrine, another teaches his, and they're both jealous over each other's success.

2. Strife

Strife describes the ensuing battle between them.

3. Slander

Insults and slander are a by-product of strife and jealousy.

4. Suspicion

A factious person tends to suspect others of evil motives.

5. Bickering

The Greek word translated "perverse disputings" (diaparatribai) speaks of something in constant friction. In his homily on 1 Timothy 5:2-7 fourth-century church father John Chrysostom said it was like infected sheep coming into contact with others and thereby spreading their disease. The legacy of error is chaos--one errorist pitted against another, jealously fighting, blaspheming, insulting one another, suspicious of one another's motives, creating nothing but constant friction. They produce nothing good at all.

C. The Product of Error

1. According to Peter

Peter said that because of them "the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words" (2 Pet. 2:2-3, NASB). They will entice unstable souls. They promise freedom but are the slaves of corruption (v. 19).

2. According to Jude

Jude said they are like unreasoning animals who follow their depraved instincts to destruction (v. 10). They rush headlong into error, traveling the path of self-centered disobedience, and are perishing in their own rebellion (v. 11). Verse 12 describes them as "hidden reefs" (NASB). False teachers cause chaos because error can never produce unity. Only truth unifies.

V. THE CAUSE OF FALSE TEACHERS (v. 5b)

"Men of corrupt minds."

False teachers have unregenerate minds--minds that have never been transformed. In Romans 8:7 Paul says their "carnal mind is enmity against God." It's filled with earthly wisdom that fights against God (James 3:15; 4:4). In Romans 1:28 Paul says, "God gave them over to a reprobate mind." Their mental faculties don't function in the moral or spiritual realm. They do not react positively to truth. In 1 Corinthians 2:14 Paul calls them natural men who "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." The pathological source of their disease is a corrupt mind. The deadly virus of ignorant, damning words comes out of an evil mind. They don't understand God and they can't understand truth. Ephesians 4:18 says their understanding is darkened, and is alienated from God. Colossians 1:21 says they are "alienated and enemies in [their] mind by wicked works."

False teachers possess alienated, wicked, darkened, and corrupt minds. They've never been transformed. They have not received the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). They may have many theological degrees, and may be involved in religious activities, but their minds are corrupt.

VI. THE CONDITION OF FALSE TEACHERS (v. 5c)

"Destitute of the truth."

A. Destitute of the Truth

False teachers are bereft of the truth. The Greek word translated "destitute" comes from a verb that means "to steal" or "to deprive." False teachers have been deprived of the truth.

1. In the middle voice

The word could be in the middle voice, which means they have deprived themselves of the truth. The forms of the word are the same. If used as a middle-voice verb it would say they were in contact with the truth but willfully deprived themselves of it. That doesn't mean they were ever saved, but they did know the truth and moved away from it.

2. In the passive voice

The word taken in the passive voice means that someone took the truth from them. Perhaps they came under the influence of someone who pulled them away from it. It is important that we warn people to be careful who they listen to and what they read so they don't become victimized. These false teachers once had contact with the truth. But now they had been deprived of it, or had deprived themselves of it. They could be "those who were once enlightened" (Heb. 6:4), but then abandoned what they once knew. So we would call their condition apostasy--they departed from the faith.

B. Departed from the Truth

Whom have these men been listening to? The father of all lies, Satan himself (John 8:44). Second Timothy 2:18 says they have erred concerning the truth, being "men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith" (3:8).

VII. THE PROGNOSIS OF FALSE TEACHERS

Their prognosis is implied in the statement "destitute of the truth": judgment. Anyone who is bereft of the truth is headed for judgment. Hebrews 6:6 tells us that if anyone turns away from the truth, there's no hope of his ever being saved. Hebrews 10:29 says that those who trample under their feet the Son of God and consider the blood of the covenant an unholy thing are headed for a disastrous and eternal judgment.

A. By Peter

Second Peter 2 says they bring "swift destruction on themselves.... Their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah ... when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly, and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes ... then the Lord knows how ... to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment" (vv. 1, 3-6, 9, NASB).

B. By Jude

Jude is very direct. It says they were "of old ordained to this condemnation" (v. 4). Verse 15 says that God is going "to convict all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." The prognosis of false teachers is judgment. They will experience the severest hell because after having seen the truth, they apostatized from it.

VIII. THE MOTIVE OF FALSE TEACHERS (v. 5d)

"Supposing that gain is godliness."

The King James Version adds the phrase "from such withdraw yourself," but earlier manuscripts don't include that. False teachers teach their doctrines to get money. They have the audacity to presume that their "godliness"--their false piety--is a way to make money.

A. Shunning the Temptation

In Acts 20:29 Paul says, "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you." Then in verse 32-33 he says, "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is

able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel." Why? Because false teachers were in the ministry to fleece the people, not feed the sheep. Paul wasn't like that. He told the Corinthians that he didn't expect anything from them (1 Cor. 9:4-18). He told the Thessalonians he didn't want to be a burden to them so he worked with his hands to provide his own living (1 Thess. 2:9).

B. Succumbing to Temptation

In 1 Timothy 3 Paul says that an elder and a deacon cannot be covetous and a lover of money because the potential to use religion to make money has always been the motivation of false teachers (vv. 3, 8). 1. Balaam Second Peter 2:3 says, "In their greed they will exploit you" (NASB). Verse 15 says they have "followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness" (NASB). Balaam was a prophet who would give a message to the highest bidder. Jude says, "They have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam" (Jude 11, NASB). They flatter "people for the sake of gaining an advantage" (v. 16, NASB). 2. Simon In Acts 8:18-19 Simon wanted to buy the Holy Spirit. He would have paid anything he could to buy the power he saw revealed. He knew if he possessed that power he could make back what he spent and a thousand other fortunes. Religious charlatans are a steady parade in this society, and are in it for the money. Stay away from people who teach doctrine contrary to Scripture. Stay away from those who deny the truth. Stay away from those who are not Christlike and godly in their conduct. Don't listen to those who are arrogant, ignorant of spiritual reality and make useless speculations. Those things generate word battles that lead to chaos, confusion, disorder, and disunity. Stay away from those with corrupt minds who have forsaken the truth and are headed for eternal judgment. Stay clear of those who are desirous of personal enrichment at your expense. They are diseased, and the prognosis for them and those they infect is terminal.

Focusing on the Facts

1. How does pathology relate to false teachers?
2. What is the first pathological characteristic of a false teacher?
3. What things did Paul want Timothy to teach and exhort (1 Tim. 6:2)?
4. What does the phrase "if anyone teaches differently" embrace (1 Tim. 6:3)?
5. What do people in the church continually face?
6. How can a believer spot false teachers and their teaching?
7. What are the "words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 6:3)?
8. What is the ultimate test of any doctrine?
9. What two things should a believer examine when trying to determine if someone is a false teacher?
10. Describe the arrogance of a false teacher?
11. How did Paul characterize the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 3:19)?
12. According to 1 Timothy 6:4, what is the preoccupation of false teachers?
13. What is another test of truth in addition to godliness?
14. What is the path to discord? Explain?
15. What kind of minds do false teachers possess (1 Tim. 6:5)?
16. What is the condition of false teachers (1 Tim. 6:5)?
17. What is the prognosis for false teachers?
18. What motivates a false teacher to perpetuate his false doctrine (1 Tim. 6:5)?

Pondering the Principles

1. A crucial test of anyone's doctrine is whether it produces godliness. When people live their lives based on the truths of Scripture, they will live godly lives. If someone were to examine the conduct of your life, would he or she conclude you are committed to the truths of Scripture? Read 1 Timothy 4:7-8. What kind of effort must you give toward living a godly life? Are you putting forth that effort?

According to verse 8, what should motivate you to be godly? Examine your own motivations. Be honest with yourself. Is there anything you're holding onto that is preventing you from becoming more godly. If there is, let go of it. Ask God to forgive you, and begin from this day forward to discipline yourself for godliness.

2. False teachers typically display wisdom is earthly, sensual, and demonic (James 3:15). Believers should be exhibiting wisdom from above. Read James 3:17-18. List each characteristic of heavenly wisdom. Next to each one, evaluate yourself on how well you exhibit that particular characteristic. Choose one that you manifest the least. Look up other Scriptures on that particular characteristic. Then pray about it. Ask God to show you what you need to do to better exhibit that characteristic of wisdom in your life. Once you know what you should do, be faithful to do it.

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