

How to Treat False Teachers, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Timothy 1:7–11

Code: 54-5

INTRODUCTION

A. The Theme of the Pastoral Epistles

1. Its importance to the church

Two key Greek words in the epistle to Timothy and Titus are didaskalia and eusebeia. Didaskalia is most frequently translated "doctrine." It is used twenty-one times in the New Testament, fifteen of those in these three small epistles. The need for sound doctrine is the main theme. The other word, eusebeia, is most often translated "godliness." It appears fifteen times in the New Testament, with ten of those being in the afore mentioned epistles. Both words are used eight times in 1 Timothy alone. Paul's primary concern was for true doctrine and godly living to be present in the church. That is just as essential for the church today.

2. Its importance in the book of Titus

To see how important these two features are, let's look at Titus. You'll notice that as Paul outlined the qualifications for church leaders in Titus 1:5-8, he was concerned about holy character and an ability to deal with sound doctrine.

a) The character of leaders Paul said "to ordain elders in every city ... if any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of profligacy [ungodly conduct], or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry [hot-tempered], not given to wine, not violent, not given to filthy lucre [he's not in it for the money], but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober minded, just, holy, temperate [self-controlled]" (vv. 5-8). That's the character of a godly man. The church is to be led by such men.

b) The ability to communicate truth In addition Paul says the godly leader should hold "fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to confute the opposers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true. Wherefore, rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. Unto the pure all things are pure, but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate. But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" (Titus 1:9--2:1). It is essential to recognize the two general qualifications for a pastor: godly living and sound doctrine. When Satan infiltrates a church, it is through either unsound doctrine or ungodly living. Our weapons against that are godliness and truth.

B. The Teaching of Matthew 7

In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus brought the Sermon on the Mount to a climax with an invitation to enter through the narrow gate onto the narrow way of salvation. After giving the invitation, He warns about the broad road that leads to destruction.

1. The warning against false teachers

Christ then said, "Beware of false prophets" (v. 15). For every true prophet calling people to the narrow way, are a multiplicity of false prophets calling people to the broad way that leads to

destruction.

Scriptural Reminders of False Teachers

Christ's warning was not new. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 documents the presence of false teaching during the days of Moses. In Isaiah 30:9-14 chronicles its existence in the kingdom of Judah. There are many warnings about false teachers in Scripture.

1. 2 John 7--John said, "Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist."

2. Romans 16:17-18--Paul said, "I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ but their own body, and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the innocent." They are dangerous because they claim to be from God and to speak God's Word.

3. Jeremiah 5:31--God said, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so."

4. Jeremiah 14:14--God said, "The prophets prophesy lies in my name. I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spoke unto them; they prophesy unto you a false vision."

2. The description of false teachers

False teachers are dangerous because their deception is damning. And it comes from that most damning deceiver of all, Satan, who disguises himself as an angel of light and his servants as ministers of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Some false teachers are heretics--those who openly reject the Word of God and teach contrary to it. Others are apostates--those who once followed the faith but have since turned away. Then there are deceivers who pretend to still believe the truth. They want to look like orthodox fundamental evangelical Christians, but they are liars.

3. The revelation of false teachers

In Matthew 7:16 Jesus says, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." It's not what they say but what you see in their lives that matters. A false teacher cannot produce good fruit because evil cannot produce good (v. 17).

False teachers will produce evil fruit, but they will try to cloak it. Inevitably they hide their bad fruit under ecclesiastical garb or isolate it from accountability. People can't get near enough to them to see the reality of their lives. Some of them hide their evil fruit under a holy vocabulary or an association with fruitful Christians. Some of them cover their evil fruit with biblical knowledge. But they can't hide it from everyone all the time. If you closely examine a false teacher, you will see his evil fruit.

REVIEW

False teachers had risen up in the church at Ephesus, and no doubt in surrounding areas. It was Timothy's task to teach sound doctrine and be an example of godly living. But he also had to put a stop to the false teachers. Therefore Paul reminded him of four things.

I. UNDERSTAND THEIR ERROR (vv. 3-4)

II. UNDERSTAND THEIR GOAL (vv. 5-6)

LESSON

III. UNDERSTAND THEIR MOTIVE (v. 7a)

"Desiring to be teachers of the law."

False teachers have a consuming desire to be teachers of God's law, but the remainder of verse 7 tells us they don't understand it. They don't want to know the law, they don't want to know God, and they don't care about people. They simply want the prestige of being recognized as a teacher.

The motive of a true teacher of God's law is in James 3:1: "Be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation." He who understands the role of a teacher knows it's not a place for proud people. But these men were proud. First Timothy 6:3-4 says, "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ ... he is proud." They were proud, the opposite what a true teacher should be (cf. 1 Pet. 5:3, 5-6). The life and writings of Martyn Lloyd-Jones have been a great inspiration to me. He wrote, "The man who is called by God is a man who realizes what he is called to do, and he so realizes the awefulness of the task that he shrinks from it. Nothing but this overwhelming sense of being called, and of compulsion, should ever lead anyone to preach" (Preachers and Preaching [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971], p. 107). It takes humility to be a servant of God along with that compulsion. But the false teachers in the Ephesian church knew neither of those things. They sought an office for the sake of its pre-eminence. Through their subtle novelties, distorted allegories, strict Judaistic legalism, and self-denying asceticism, they wanted to be exalted as teachers of the law (nomos didaskalos), a Jewish term referring to teaching the Mosaic Law like a rabbi. They were on a grand ego trip. They wanted the prestige of the rabbinic role, and they wanted to impose the heresy of salvation by works. Their motive was wrong. They weren't compelled to preach in humble servitude; they were seeking pre-eminence.

IV. UNDERSTAND THEIR EFFECT (vv. 7b-11)

A. The Ignorance of False Teachers (v. 7b)

"Understanding neither what they say, nor that about which they affirm."

The Greek word translated "affirm" (diabebaioomai) could be translated "speak dogmatically." Not only did these false teachers say things they didn't understand, but also they said them dogmatically as if they were absolute truth. There are many like them today who pretend to be teachers of God's truth. But if you know the Word of God and listen closely to what they say, you know they don't understand what they're talking about. Furthermore, they are continually and confidently dogmatic about what they are truly ignorant.

B. The Importance of the Law (vv. 8-11)

1. It is good (v. 8)

"We know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully." Even though false teachers misrepresent the law, the law itself remains good. The epitome of their error is to set up the law as a means of salvation. That appeals to men who are proud because they believe in the illusion that by themselves they are good enough to please God. A prideful person doesn't need a Savior because he believes he can attain God's standard by himself. The law is good when it is used lawfully, but how do you use it lawfully? That's what Paul discusses in the following verses.

2. It condemns sinners (vv. 9-10)

a) A declaration of judgment (v. 9a) "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man." The Greek text could well be translated, "Law in general is not made for righteous men." The definite article is absent before "law," making it a general reference, yet one that surely encompasses the Mosaic Law. The law is not made for righteous men; it's made to condemn sinners. Romans 3:19-20 says the law was written so that "every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." The law condemns everyone to hell because "there is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth" (Rom. 3:10-11). There is not one person who can fulfill God's standard on his own. The Jewish leaders thought they fulfilled it. But in Romans 10:3 Paul says they were ignorant of God's righteousness and went about establishing their own righteousness. They thought God was less righteous than He was, and that they were more righteous than they were. They were parading around as if they were righteous keepers of the law. But the law isn't for the righteous. As long as anyone thinks he is righteous, he will never be saved because he will never see the true use of the

law.

b) A description of sinners (vv. 9b-10a)"The law is ... for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for them that defile themselves with mankind [homosexuals], for kidnapers, for liars, for perjured persons [perjurers]."The law is designed to expose sinners for what they really are. The law is good, but it is not good news. The law wasn't made for righteous men; it was made for sinners so they could see their sin.(1) Separating the pairsTo demonstrate his point, Paul pulled his definitions of sinners from the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3-17). The first three pairs--lawless and disobedient, ungodly and sinners, unholy and profane, all refer to the first part of the Ten Commandments, which govern our relationship to God. God commands that we not have any other gods before Him, that we worship the true God, that we make no graven images, and that we remember He is the only one to be adored and worshiped (vv. 3-5). Then in mentioning murderers, fornicators, homosexuals, kidnapers, and liars, he moves through the second half of the Ten Commandments, which govern our relationship to others.(2) Defining the pairs(a) The first groupThe first three pairs are assembled with both a negative characteristic and a resulting action.i) Lawless--disobedientLawlessness produces disobedience. Anyone who has no standards will be insubordinate. If you don't believe in the law, you won't pay any attention to it. So the lawless are disobedient.ii) Ungodly--sinnersSomeone who is ungodly doesn't care about God or what is true of God. Therefore he commits sin.iii) Unholy--profaneAn unholy person is irreverent. He is indifferent to God and the duty he should render to God. He has no regard for anything sacred.The law was made for people who are disobedient, impure, and irreverent to show them what they are. When they match their lives to the law of God, they will see themselves as lawless and disobedient, ungodly and sinful, and unholy and profane.(b) The second groupPaul then moved to the second group of the Ten Commandments, dealing with man's relationship to man.i) The fifth commandmentThe fifth commandment says, "Honor thy father and thy mother" (Ex. 20:12). In 1 Timothy 1:9 Paul says the law is made "for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers." That same commandment is broadened in Exodus 21:15: "He that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death." The law was made for people who break the fifth commandment by not honoring their parents. That encompasses dishonor, murder, and everything in between.ii) The sixth commandmentThe Greek word translated "manslayers" in 1 Timothy 1:9 literally means "murderers." The term "manslaughter" refers to accidental death, but that's not what Paul had in mind here. He was referring to the sixth commandment, which says, "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13, NASB).iii) The seventh commandmentAccording to 1 Timothy 1:10 the law is also made for "fornicators [heterosexual sinners]" and "for them that defile themselves with mankind [Gk., arsenokoit[ma]es, "homosexuals"]." That Greek word is made up of two words: "male" and "marriage bed"--males in the marriage bed. Fornicators homosexuality are a violation of the seventh commandment of God, which allows for no sexual relationship except that between a man and his wife.iv) The eighth commandmentThe eighth commandment says, "Thou shalt not steal" (Ex. 20:15). In 1 Timothy 1:10 Paul refers to "kidnapers." In his day, one of the most prominent ways men revealed their depravity was in stealing children. There was a great need for slaves, and children were easy prey. Exodus 21:16 and Deuteronomy 24:7 assign the death penalty for those who commit such a crime.v) The ninth commandmentThen Paul mentioned liars and perjurers, violators of the ninth commandment, which states, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" (Ex. 20:16).Paul may have given this list because each of the things on it were characteristic of the false teachers in the Ephesian church. Matthew 7:15-20 warns us that a false teacher may appear like a true shepherd. If the truth were known about his life--if you could remove his ecclesiastical garb and filter out his religious talk, you would find some of the characteristics from 1 Timothy 1:9- 10. Perhaps one of the leaders in the Ephesian church had killed his parents or had stolen children and sold them into slavery. Maybe one or more were homosexuals. Some of them might have been liars. So Paul indicted the false leaders in the

Ephesian assembly. Nothing is wrong with the law. In fact in Romans 7:7-12 Paul says, "Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin but by the law; for I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.... Apart from the law sin is dead.... but when the commandment came, sin removed, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore, the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good." Later in verse 22 Paul says, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." The law is good because it's the first half of the gospel: it tells people that they're sinners. The second part of the gospel tells them there is a Savior.^c) A doctrine that is sound (v. 10b)"And if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine."The Greek word translated "sound" is hugianin[ma]o, from which we derive the English word hygenic. It speaks of that which is healthy, wholesome, and promoting life and health. Paul is advocating the kind of teaching that produces spiritual life and growth.³ It is part of the gospel (v. 11)"According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust."^a) The glorious gospel(1) DefinedPaul is affirming that the law is part of the gospel. What is the gospel? That man is a sinner of such depth and profundity that he cannot redeem himself. But Jesus Christ--God in human flesh--came into the world, died on a cross, was raised the third day for our justification, and through faith in Him and by the grace of God we can be forgiven of our sins. Thus to rightly define the law is part of that gospel. Initially, the good news is bad. The gospel says man is a sinner: he is lost without Christ, his sin is unforgiven, which damns him forever in an eternal hell.(2) DeniedWhen people cover up the message of sin, it helps no one. The law is not to be hidden. If someone claims to have a better message than the glorious gospel of the blessed God, then he has no understanding of who He is. I'm continually amazed by the number of people who want to emasculate the law aspect of the gospel. They want to strip out mention of sin because they think they have a better gospel than God's glorious one.(3) DemonstratedThe gospel is glorious because it demonstrates God's glory. Part of God's glory is His attributes, some of which are His hatred of sin, wrath, judgment, condemnation, and holiness. But when those attributes are stripped from the gospel, God becomes nothing more than a benign Santa Claus. That's not the glorious God or His glorious gospel. People have to see His holy hatred of sin and His condemning justice because they are part of His essential being. Only then can they understand His grace, mercy, and love.The gospel is called glorious because it is how God's glory is revealed. It begins with the law that damns men to hell, but ends with forgiven sinners. All that God is comes together in the gospel. It is the gospel of His glory.^b) The blessed God"The blessed God" doesn't mean He's the God we bless; it means God is the source of blessing. In 1 Timothy 6:15 Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, as "the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords." His very nature is perfect, magnificent, and forever blessed.^c) The faithful apostlePaul concludes 1 Timothy 1:11 by saying that the glorious gospel of the blessed God was committed to his trust. He didn't receive it from men, but from Christ Himself (Gal. 1:11-12). He wanted to be a faithful steward of the mysteries God had revealed to him (1 Cor. 4:1-2). In 1 Corinthians 9:16 Paul says, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" And in Romans 1:15-17 he says, "As much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Paul was under a divine commission.

Conclusion

How can we be alert to the infiltration of false teachers? Ask yourself these questions about the Bible teachers you encounter.

A. How Is the Teacher Using Scripture?

Is there error in his understanding of Scripture? Is his interpretation sound? Is it biblical? Is it legitimate? Don't look at his personality. Don't look at the religious trappings. Don't only look only at his associations, although that will tell you something if those associations are negative. Listen to what he says. Do what 1 John 4:1 says: test him to see if he's from God. What is his approach to

Scripture? Is he teaching things that go beyond Scripture? Is he saying things that sound good but you can't find verses to support it?

B. What Is the Teacher's Goal?

Does he have a spiritual goal? Is his primary desire in life to produce people who consummately love God? Or is he characterized by self-love, self-aggrandizement, possessiveness, and materialism? What is his objective? Is it love for God and for everyone else? Is his objective holiness, a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith without hypocrisy?

C. What Is the Teacher's Motive?

Does he demonstrate a selfless motive? Can you see humility, meekness, and selflessness in his life? Or does it appear that while he's helping others he is also becoming quite wealthy? Is he self-indulgent at the expense of the people he is supposed to be ministering to?

D. What Is the Teacher's Effect?

Does his followers clearly understand the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do they understand the proper use of the law?

Check his doctrine, check his goal, check his motive, and check his followers. As you do, you'll sense the need for urgency in dealing with false teachers.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What was Paul's primary purpose in writing to Timothy?
2. In what way did Jesus warn His disciples about the danger of false prophets?
3. What are some ways that false teachers can be characterized?
4. What ultimately will expose a false teacher for what he is?
5. Identify the consuming desire of false teachers (1 Tim. 1:7).
6. What does a genuine teacher of God's Word understand about his role?
7. What is the true motive behind the consuming desire of false teachers?
8. How does Paul describe the ignorance of false teachers (1 Tim. 1:7)?
9. How do false teachers misuse the law of God?
10. Explain how the law of God can be good yet be a bearer of bad news.
11. For what purpose was the law made?
12. How does Paul describe sinners? Explain each description (1 Tim. 1:9-10).
13. What two relationships do the Ten Commandments govern?
14. What might have been Paul's reason for giving such an extensive list of a negative characteristics in 1 Timothy 1:9-10?
15. What is the gospel? Why is it called "glorious"?
16. Explain the title "the blessed God".
17. What should a believer do to be alert to the infiltration of false teachers?

Pondering the Principles

1. The Greek word for doctrine (didaskalia) and for godliness (eusebeia) are each used eight times in 1 Timothy. Look up each of those references: doctrine (1:10; 4:1, 6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 3) and godliness (2:2; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11). What conclusions can you draw from Paul's use of those words? What personal applications can you make?
2. Review the list of questions on pages 10-11. If you have been concerned about the Bible teaching you, or someone you know has been receiving, compare that teacher and his teaching against that grid. Determine what he is teaching. Try to find out his goals--are they spiritual? What is his motive? Finally, do the people that sit under his teaching have a clear understanding of the gospel? If the teacher and his teaching doesn't pass the test (1 John 4:1), remove yourself from that environment, or pluck your friend from the fire (Jude 23).

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