

How Do We Identify False Teaching?

A. Knowing the Challenge

1. While most of our topics in this series dealt with challenges from outside the Church, and from non-Christians, this topic deals primarily with challenges within the Church and from other professing Christians
2. The Bible warns us that false doctrine and teaching will occur within the Church:
 - a. Paul left Timothy at Ephesus to prevent false teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-4)
 - b. He warned Timothy that in later times some would fall away from sound doctrine (“the faith”) (1 Timothy 4:1)
 - c. He wrote to him that some would **“turn away their ears from the truth and turn aside to myths”** because they like their ears to be tickled (2 Timothy 4:3-4)
3. What’s at the root of false doctrine are some basic false ideas:
 - a. There are multiple sources of spiritual truth, not just the Bible
 - b. All “truth” is God’s truth
 - c. There are many ways to interpret the Bible
 - d. All interpretations are equally valid
 - e. What really matters is what it says to me/you
 - f. As long as it’s true for me/you that’s all that matters (catch phrase “my truth”)
 - g. Doctrine isn’t important
 - h. God doesn’t care about doctrine; He only cares about one’s heart/motives/faith

B. Knowing the Truth—there are two things we need to examine (the doctrine itself and the teachers)

1. We need to examine the doctrine or teaching itself (three characteristics of sound doctrine)
 - a. The FIRST characteristic of sound doctrine is that it originates from God’s Word; false doctrine originates elsewhere:
 - 1) The Bible identifies three sources of doctrine or teaching—only one of which is inerrant and infallible (without error and incapable of being wrong):
 - a) One source is Man—but look at the way the Bible describes doctrine and teaching that originates from man:
 - Colossians 2:16-23: it comes from the **“fleshly mind”**; it’s based on **“elementary principles of the world”**; it has the **“appearance of wisdom”** but only in **“self-made religion”**
 - Ephesians 4:14: it’s like **“wind”**, **“trickery”**, **“craftiness”** and **“deceitful scheming”**
 - 2 Timothy 2:16-18: it’s **“worldly and empty chatter”**; like **“gangrene”**
 - Romans 16:17-18: it leads to **“dissensions and hindrances”**
 - 1 Timothy 1:3-4: it’s based on **“myths”** and **“mere speculation”**
 - 1 Timothy 4:7: **“worldly fables fit only for old women”**
 - 2 Peter 2:1: **“destructive heresies”**
 - So the rhetorical question is, Can we really trust the teaching and doctrine that originates from man?
 - b) Another source of teaching is Satan/demons:

- 1 Timothy 4:1: **“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,”**
 - James refers to wisdom which is demonic (James 3:15)
 - John refers to the spirit of the anti-christ which is behind the false prophets who are sent out into the world (1 John 4:1-3)
 - We obviously cannot trust what comes from this source because Satan is the Father of lies (John 8:44): **“He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”**
- c) The final source is God:
- God has revealed spiritual truth verbally and in written form, but the written form (OT and NT) have always been the primary method of recording and preserving doctrine (e.g. Paul spoke doctrine, but he wrote to preserve it):
 - 2 Timothy 3:16-17: it is **“God-breathed”**
 - Psalm 19:7-10: it’s **“perfect”, “sure”, “right”, “pure”, “clean”, “true”** and **“righteous altogether”**
- 2) Only one of the three sources above is inerrant (without error) and infallible (incapable of being wrong)—and that’s God and His Word
- 3) So, the first test when identifying false doctrine is to ask, What’s the source of the doctrine or teaching? Is it the Bible or something else?
- a) The Spiritual Formation movement is filled with teachings and doctrines from other religions and those who reject the Gospel and Christ (example: class at Grace College and Seminary—10 of the 12 text books for the class were authored by non-Christians, Catholics and mystics)
- b) Theistic evolution and Old Earth beliefs are based on observations of men, scientific theories, etc.
- c) “Christian” counseling or psychology is most often based on a mix of secular psychology and the Bible
- This is referred to as integration
 - As much as I appreciate James Dobson’s ministry in many areas, Sigmund Freud was not God’s greatest gift to the church
 - Larry Crabb and Grace Theological Seminary
- b. The SECOND characteristic of sound doctrine is that it reflects the authority and supremacy of the Bible, while false teaching generally reflects some other authority (e.g. other writings, the teacher, what God has supposedly *revealed* or told him or her, etc.):
- 1) 2 Timothy 3:14-17
- a) Paul encouraged Timothy to **“continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them and that from childhood you have known the sacred ...”**
- b) Paul speaks to two sources of authority here, both of which refer to God’s Word—himself as the Apostle and prophet who taught Timothy, and the Old Testament
- c) Paul then follows this up with a reminder of the inspiration of Scripture (16) and the charge to **“Preach the Word”** (4:2)

- d) These verses were to serve as Paul's reminder to Timothy that his authority when it came to doctrinal matters and teaching was none other than the Scriptures
- 2) Titus 1:9:
- a) Paul instructed Titus that an elder must **"hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict."**
 - b) So, an elder's authority to both **"exhort in sound doctrine"** and **"refute those who contradict"** comes from the Word, not their position
 - c) 1 Corinthians 2:1-16
 - Paul reminded the Corinthians that his authority didn't come from his own teaching or oration abilities, but rather the Gospel
 - He wanted to be known as someone who knew and taught one thing—the Gospel and wisdom of God—rather than be known for his speaking abilities (2-4)
 - d) Acts 17:11: the Bereans demonstrated a keen understanding of where genuine Godly authority rests by evaluating what Paul and Silas taught against the Scriptures
- 3) So, the second question to ask when examining doctrine is, What's the authority behind this teaching? Is it the Bible, or something else (for instance, the teacher and/or his position, popularity, etc.)?
- It's true that God spoke directly to some of the Apostles during the 1st century like Paul and Peter as a means to establishing the Canon of Scripture, but it wasn't normative for most Christians (just read the book of Acts—only four examples of tongues and even fewer examples of prophecy)
 - However it is common among the false teachers of today's Pentecostal and Word Faith movements like Rod Parsley, Joyce Meyer, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn

It's also found in evangelical circles as well with people like Beth Moore who claims that God often talks to her in pictures and reveals things to her
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUC7-1zfMQo>)

- c. The THIRD characteristic of sound doctrine is that it is consistent with the whole of Scripture, while false teaching is not:
 - 1) Did you ever wonder why God used 40 different authors, over thousands of year years, to write 66 different books/letters?
 - 2) Our doctrines, our core beliefs, are not built upon what one writer wrote or said—they are spread throughout the Bible in multiple places and there is incredible consistency in the theology of the Bible from the very first word of Genesis 1 to the very last word of Revelation 22
 - 3) There is a principle in hermeneutics: Scripture interprets Scripture
 - a) This means that when you are interpreting a passage of Scripture, you must rely on other passages of Scripture to properly interpret it
 - b) It also means that doctrine is rarely built on just one passage or independent verses of the Bible without support from other verses and passages of the Bible

- c) It also means that doctrine is not built on one teacher's or pastor's or author's vision from God
- 4) This is demonstrated in the Scriptures:
 - a) Hebrews 13:7-9: **"Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. 9 Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings..."**
 - The author calls them to remember what they were taught from the Word of God and to not be carried away by "varied and strange teachings"
 - The word for strange here refers to things that were not previously known, unheard of or unfamiliar, and in this case meaning foreign to the Word of God
 - b) 1 Timothy 1:3 and 6:3: Paul told Timothy to instruct men not to teach **"strange doctrines"**—the literal rendering is closer to the ESV and : **"different doctrine"** or **"other doctrine"**
 - c) Throughout 1st and 2nd Timothy, Paul reminds Timothy to pass on the doctrines and tradition of teaching he learned from Paul as an Apostle, and to preach the Word, and to avoid everything else because it was based on myths, speculations, the imagination of men, etc.
- 5) So, the third question to ask when examining doctrine is, How does this teaching align with the rest of Scripture? Is it based on a single passage or a handful of proof-texts? Does the teacher claim it's something God specifically *revealed* to him or her through a vision or dream, rather than something they discovered in the Bible?
- 2. We not only need to examine the doctrine, but need to examine those who teach and preach, no matter what the medium (e.g. preaching, teaching, radio, TV, books, magazine, etc.)
 - a. They should be competent and skilled in handling the Word:
 - 1) 2 Timothy 2:15: **"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."**
 - 2) Titus 1:10: Elders (those who teach) must be those who are **"holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."**
 - 3) So, ask yourself when evaluating teachers, preachers, authors...how do they handle the Word of God? Do they actually use the Bible?

Pastor Krenz—answering with only the Bible
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- b. Sometimes there are telltale signs of false teachers:
 - 1) Titus 1:11: **"For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, ¹¹ who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain."**
 - 2) 2 Peter 3:17: **"You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,"**
 - 3) Romans 16:17-18: **"Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn**

away from them. **18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.**

- 4) 1 Timothy 4:2: **“by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron”**
- 5) So, evaluate attitudes, motives and actions of teachers

The preaching circuits of Steven Furtick, TD Jakes and the likes
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C. Knowing How to Respond

The Bible provides instruction on how to confront false teaching:

1. First, we should be afraid to call false teaching what it is—Paul did throughout his writings as seen above
2. Second, we shouldn’t be afraid to call false teachers what they are—again, Paul did just that on more than one occasion (2 Timothy 2:17: Hymenaeus and Philetus)
3. However, there is a right way and a wrong way to do it
 - a. 2 Timothy 2:24-26:
 - 1) We **“must not be quarrelsome”**
 - 2) We should be **“kind”** and **“patient”**, even when **“wronged”**
 - 3) We should be **“gentle”** when correcting other believers who teach or promote false doctrine
 - 4) We should desire that God grant them both **“repentance”** and **“the knowledge of the truth”**
 - 5) We should understand that many times, they are in the snare of the devil
 - b. 2 Timothy 4:1-5:
 - 1) We should be ready to confront with the Word
 - 2) But we should do so with **“great patience and instruction”**
 - c. 1 Timothy 6:20 and 2 Timothy 2:16:
 - 1) We should avoid **“worldly and empty chatter”**—the word for empty chatter here refers to talk which lacks significant content or value
 - 2) There are some conversations that aren’t worth having, or some things that just aren’t worth arguing over